Fury:
The Wind Unicorn
Bridget McGowan

# Fury:
# The Wind Unicorn
**A novel by**
# Bridget McGowan

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**For Ava Unicorn, who inspired this novel.**

# Chapter 1

Teddy Lyndhurst sat in a tree reading a book. He would have liked to play with the other boys, but they were off playing baseball. He was always the last one picked, and if there was an odd number, he wouldn't be picked at all. It was rare for anyone to invite him to play.

He wasn't that upset. He didn't really like baseball. He didn't like to admit it, but he preferred to sit in the tree reading.

The distant sound of children playing faded from Teddy's consciousness, and eventually faded from the neighborhood as clouds piled up and became darker. Teddy didn't notice until the first drops of rain fell through the leaves and dripped onto the pages of his book. He closed it and looked at the ominous sky. As he skinned down the tree, thunder rumbled off in the distance.

Teddy ran into the house just ahead of a downpour. The wind began to blow, and thunder cracked closer. A siren sounded. His mother hurried him into the storm cellar, closing the door behind them and locking it.

The door rattled, and they could hear the howling and clatter outside. Teddy hated the sound. He hated living in a place where he had to worry about tornadoes, worry about coming out of the storm cellar to find everything he knew gone. Fortunately, so far, his house had never been in the direct path of a tornado. But someday it was bound to happen.

Although the storm cellar was relatively small, the Lyndhursts had made the room as comfortable as the space allowed. An old sofa stood against one wall, with a chair and a small table adjacent to it. A battery powered lamp on the table kept the room from being completely dark. There were also candles and matches in a drawer of the table, in case the lamp failed. Behind the ladder that led into the cellar, was a box of bottled water and some snacks, in case they ever needed to stay there for an extended period. Beside the box were a few old games and some books. Opposite the sofa was a sleeping bag on the floor.

Teddy climbed into the sleeping bag, covering his head to blot out the noise from outside.

Suddenly, everything was quiet. Deadly quiet. His mother had been humming a song. She did that whenever she was upset and trying to appear calm. Even that had stopped. He pushed the cover back and looked around. The storm cellar was gone. His mother was gone. In place of what he knew was an open field, a blue sky and a slight breeze. He sat under a tree that would've been great to climb if he'd known where he was.

"Mom?" he called, then called again a little louder. There was no reply.

Teddy looked around him. This was nowhere he recognized. He was scared, but trying not to be.

"You look lost," said a voice behind him. He turned quickly, but saw only a horse grazing on some grass. He saw no signs of anyone. Teddy looked up into the trees, but no one was there, either.

As the horse lifted his head, Teddy saw a long, twisted multicolored horn jutting out of its forehead. He rubbed his eyes. That couldn't be. Unicorns didn't exist.

"What brings you here?" the unicorn asked. The creature's lips didn't move. He spoke directly into Teddy's head.

"I don't know. I was in the storm cellar, waiting for the tornado to pass, and all of the sudden I was here. Where *is* here?

"Ah, that's what did it. This is the land of wind. Tell me, what is your name?"

"Teddy Lyndhurst. What's yours?"

"Fury."

"Are you really a unicorn?"

"I am. My mother was a horse, and my father was a unicorn."

"Was?"

"He is no more. His life was long but it ended."

"I'm sorry."

"Life is that way. There can only be one unicorn in a land at a time. He died nobly."

"Are there more unicorns somewhere else?"

"In other lands there are. I am the unicorn for this land."

"What do you do?"

"I greet the visitors and introduce them to the land, the people and the way of life."

"But this is just a field."

"Come with me, and I will show you the rest."

"I don't know how I got here."

"The storm in your home land brought you."

"Is my house destroyed?"

"I'm sorry. I can't answer that."

"How do I get back? My mother will worry."

"Time runs differently here. You will return at the proper time. Your mother most likely will not notice you're gone. Meanwhile, why not see what we have to offer?"

Teddy looked around, and seeing no way of getting back, decided he might as well have a look around. His mother had warned him about talking to strangers, but

she'd never said he shouldn't talk to a unicorn.

Fury bowed down so Teddy could climb onto his back. Once the boy had mounted the unicorn, they raced off across the meadow. Teddy had never been on a horse before, so he worried that he'd fall. But Fury ran so evenly that all the boy had to do was hold onto Fury's mane.

As they moved quickly across the plain, Teddy began to see a town off in the distance. When they came closer, he noticed the buildings were different from those at home. The buildings were mainly stone. The small houses had thatched roofs.

They approached the town and Teddy noticed a castle in the center of the town. The guards at the gate, seeing Fury, opened it and saluted Teddy as he and Fury went through.

The town was designed in a circle around the castle. The main road led directly from the gate to the castle, and there was a drawbridge over a moat before the castle entrance. Although the houses had thatched roofs, he noticed some tile roofs of dark red. These were on buildings taller than the houses but shorter than the castle.

Teddy had noticed before they entered the gate that there were horses, cows and pigs in the surrounding fields, with stone walls keeping the animals from running off. He didn't see any crops, but thought perhaps they were on the other side so they wouldn't be trampled by the animals.

Fury walked sedately through the town. People looked up at Teddy and smiled as he passed. He had never seen so many people being friendly to a stranger before.

As they approached the castle, the drawbridge lowered. Guards stood at attention, lining both sides of the drawbridge as Fury passed. When they arrived at the door, Fury stopped.

"It is time for you to go in," Fury said.

"But – by myself?"

"A unicorn, alas, cannot enter the castle."

"But – I don't know what to do!"

"Do not worry. They will guide you."

Teddy slid off Fury's back. As he walked up the steps to the door, it opened, and a man wearing black boots, blue satin breeches and jacket and a loose white shirt stood before him. Only as the man bowed to him did Teddy notice the sword hanging at his side. Not knowing what else to do, Teddy bowed.

"Greetings. Welcome to Blevny, the land of Breezes. What name do you go by?"

"I'm Teddy."

"Teddy. Welcome. I am Landis."

Landis led the boy into the castle. Teddy's mouth gaped open as he looked at the walls, which appeared to be made of crystal.

They walked down a long hallway with pictures of battles between knights on the shimmering walls. Here and there, where they crossed another corridor, or where a small alcove had been built in the wall, stood a suit of armor. The black and white patterned floor was as shiny as Landis's boots.

They arrived at huge carved wooden doors. Two guards stood at attention outside the doors, and as Teddy and Landis arrived, the guards opened the doors. They entered, and Landis whispered something to a man dressed the same way he was dressed, who stood just inside the doors. The new man held a tall staff, and now hit the floor three times with it. The many people standing, sitting or walking around the room stopped what they were doing and looked at the man with the staff.

"Hear ye, hear ye, Lord Teddy has arrived."

There were some applause, and Teddy looked up at Landis in confusion.

"Lord Teddy? I'm just a kid. I'm not a lord."

"But here you are."

"Where's my mom?"

"Right where you left her. Time passes differently in this world than in yours."

He led Teddy to the other end of the room, where several men and women sat at a large table. It looked like they were doing important business. All were dressed in clothes that were strange to Teddy. While he wore jeans and a T-shirt, these people wore silk and satin clothes in pale colors, trousers and fancy shoes, frilled shirts and jackets with tails. He had expected the women to wear huge, long dresses that laced up the back, but not one of the women wore a dress. Some wore boots instead of shoes. Most had shorter hair than Teddy's. Everything else looked like what he'd read about the Middle Ages – knights, kings and queens, castles and armor. But the people didn't quite fit his image.

"Where are we?" he asked Landis as he lead him toward the table.

"This is the kingdom of Blevny. The man in the green coat is King Eustace. The woman in the yellow coat is Queen Audra. They rule the kingdom."

"The women don't wear dresses?"

"That would not be practical, given the winds that often blow in from the coast."

"Ah, so this is Lord Teddy," the king said.

"Your highness, I don't think I'm a lord," Teddy said.

"You are, indeed. All people who visit from the real world, as they call it, are lords or ladies. We highly respect them. Have you had a chance to see our land?"

"Only a field and the outside of the castle," Teddy replied.

“Ah, then you must tour the realm with Fury. He knows all of the places that would be of interest to you.”

Teddy looked troubled.

“What is it?” the king asked.

“Am I dead?”

“Dead?” the king replied, amused, while those around him chuckled. “Why would you think that?”

“I was with my mom and a tornado was coming. Then I was here.”

“That is the way it happens. But no, you are alive, and in time you will return to your land.”

“How long will I be here?”

“We never know that. It may be days or weeks, but it is only minutes in your world. You will return exactly where you left.”

“Have you been in my realm?”

“I was born in your realm.”

Teddy was astounded. He had many questions, but thought the king was busy and wouldn’t have time to answer. He looked around him and saw people politely waiting. He had interrupted the business of the day.

Landis guided Teddy back to where Fury waited for him.

“Thank you for visiting. If you are staying for a few days you will be invited to the solstice party.”

“What’s that?” Teddy asked.

“A celebration of summer. It is when the winds slow to breezes, and the weather is all you could desire.”

“I don’t know how long I’ll be here. I don’t know how I got here or how I get back.”

“You need not worry. You will return to your home at the appropriate time.”

Fury awaited him on the far side of the drawbridge, and Teddy mounted him.

“Aren’t you tired?” Teddy asked.

“My needs have been seen to,” Fury replied. “I have rested while you met the king.”

He trotted away from the castle and took the boy to a village not far away. There were several stone homes with thatched roofs, an inn and a blacksmith shop. They could hear the clanging of metal being hammered, although Teddy didn’t know what the sound was. When he asked, Fury took him to see.

The boy dismounted and walked into the barnlike building. Heat met him as he entered, and he saw the low hot fire and a man working nearby.

“Hello, young sir,” the blacksmith greeted Teddy.

“Hello, sir,” Teddy replied. “I was curious what you were doing.”

“I’m making a sword for the prince,” he said. “Prince Alexander is to become a knight of the realm and needs a good sword of his own.”

“I’m Teddy. May I watch?”

“Of course you may. I’m Raneesh.”

Raneesh was as tall as Teddy’s father, but a huge, bulky man, the bulging muscles on his arms making them look as big as most men’s legs. His legs were powerful, but not as massive. Of course, it was difficult to tell, since long brown trousers covered them. He wore no shirt, so it was easy to see the massive muscles of his arms, chest and back. His body glistened with sweat, and Teddy wondered if his skin was really that smoky brown color, or if the dust from the floor of the forge and the smoke of the fire caused it. His hair was short and curly, and his eyes were a surprising pale blue.

He explained his art to the boy as he worked. When he thrust the hot blade into a pail of water, it sizzled and steam rose to mingle with the smoke of the fire.

“Does it take a very long time to make a sword?” Teddy asked.

“Not so very long. A week or so.”

“That sounds long for one sword.”

“The blade itself must be layered for strength, and then the hilt must be finely crafted and overlaid with gold and gems. It isn’t something a machine spits out.”

He handed the sword to Teddy. It was far heavier than he expected, and he could barely hold it up with two hands. The smith chuckled and took it back

“You see how much strength a prince needs.”

“I don’t think I’d ever be strong enough.”

“You are young. When you are a man this will seem as nothing. And the prince has been practicing with gradually heavier swords since he was seven.”

“I’m nine.”

“The prince is seventeen. This sword will be a gift to mark his eighteenth birthday.”

“You’re giving him a sword?”

“I?” Raneesh asked, laughing. “Nay. I am not rich enough. The king is paying me to make it. This is how I earn my living, although I more often make horse shoes than swords.”

“Will the prince fight in a battle?”

“I hope not. We have had peace these many years. It is my hope our prince never needs to fight in battle.”

This was strange to Teddy. He had read about knights, and they always had battles to fight and wars to win. What was the point in having a sword if you never

got the chance to use it?

"You must be tired after your journey," Raneesh said. "I see Fury awaits you to take you to your abode."

"What's that?"

"The place you will stay."

"I don't have a place to stay."

"Visitors from your land always have a place to stay. Stop by any time you wish to see how I make my wares."

How peculiar! Everyone knew who he was and where he had come from.

Fury brought him to a house near the center of the town. A man about his father's age came out to greet him.

"You must be Teddy."

"I am, yes."

"I am Taurek. My wife, Hilda, is inside. We are honored to be chosen to show you hospitality. Come in, come in."

Taurek was a few inches shorter than Teddy's father with strong muscles, shoulder-length blond hair and kind-looking brown eyes. He led the boy into their home.

The house was simple, with wooden floors. The main room appeared to be living room, dining room and kitchen in one. A fire burned on one side of the room in a fireplace big enough to walk into. Various pots hung on hooks just inside the fireplace. Dishes decorated the shelves on either side of it. In the center hung a huge cauldron, and whatever was cooking in it smelled delicious.

In the center of the room stood a large wooden table with stools placed around it. At each end was a chair with arms. Having two chairs with arms showed their wealth.

A door on the wall opposite the door to the outside was closed with a wooden bar keeping it in place. On the wall opposite the fireplace were two doors with latches.

"That room is where Hilda and I sleep. The other is for you," Taurek said.

Hilda, who had been adding items to the cauldron, left her work and led Teddy to the room. She was a few inches shorter than Taurek, with a slender figure and long brown hair that she wore in several braids that crossed her head and formed fantastic shapes that kept it out of her way. Her large eyes were green, and she smiled frequently, like someone with a great secret. She was, perhaps, ten years younger than Teddy's mother.

Once Teddy was inside the room, Hilda told him she would let him freshen up, and she left him there.

The room had a wooden bed heaped with blankets and pillows, a small table beside it containing a lantern, a wash basin, pitcher of water and a towel. On the wall adjacent to the bed was a window showing the growing darkness, and what looked like a mountain across a huge field from where they were.

In a corner of the room was an old-fashioned wardrobe. Inside it were clothes that looked like they were Teddy's size. There were brown boots, brown cloth trousers and a white shirt that laced halfway up the front instead of having buttons as well as a brown suede jacket. Beside these clothes hung a fancy velvet jacket and trousers in black and a formal white shirt. There was also a long black coat. He supposed those things were for fancy occasions.

On the inside of the door to the wardrobe were a mirror and a shelf containing a comb and brush.

Teddy looked at the clothes he was wearing. He'd been in and out of the tree all day before the storm, so his jeans and T-shirt were a bit dirty. He supposed it would be good manners to change into other clothes. He undressed and washed his face and hands, then dressed in the everyday clothes in the wardrobe. He decided to wear his sneakers instead of the boots.

He hung his clothes on a hook inside the door and combed his hair before closing the wardrobe. He was surprised that he looked the same as ever. He thought perhaps he had somehow changed when he arrived in this place.

He left the room and returned to the main part of the house. Hilda told him he looked nice as she showed him to his place at the table – despite having been told he was Lord Teddy, she did not give him one of the armed chairs. She set out trenchers for each of them and dished out the stew she had been making when he arrived. When all was ready, she and Taurek sat.

"What do you do for a living?" Teddy asked after they had been eating for a while.

"I captain a ship."

"A ship? Where?" Teddy asked, nearly laughing.

"The sea is just the other side of the castle. Did you not see it when you visited the castle?"

"No, I never did."

"Fury will show you, I'm sure. We will be shipping out the day after tomorrow for two weeks. It's a fishing vessel, and we supply the king with his fish."

"Won't you miss him?" Teddy asked Hilda.

"Well, certainly. But I will have much to do caring for the cows, sheep and chickens."

Teddy found all this very odd. He'd seen nothing of farm animals when he arrived. They were in the middle of the village.

"Where are the animals?"

"Across the field. Did you notice the mountain when you were in your room?"

"All the way out there?"

Hilda laughed. No, not so far. But in the evening the mountain makes it difficult to see the barn buildings. The animals graze out in that field."

"All together?"

"No, the chickens have a yard to keep them from being trampled or getting lost. I wouldn't want to spend my days searching for eggs."

They had a merry meal, with Teddy telling them about life at home and the jobs his parents had. They found the idea of offices quite strange, but were glad to know he lived near farms. They told him stories of their land.

Taurek spoke of how life was when he was growing up. His father had been a farmer. Taurek, as eldest son, was to inherit the farm, but three years of drought had forced his father to sell the land and move into town. Taurek and his younger brother had worked and saved to buy their ship.

"So you go with your brother to fish?"

"No more. He has never loved the sea. He is apprenticed to the blacksmith now."

"I met the blacksmith. He was making a sword."

"My brother so far works on horseshoes. He was likely not there today."

"I didn't see him."

Hilda had been quiet during this discussion, and now Teddy turned to her.

"Did you live on a farm, too, when you were growing up?" he asked her.

"I came from your land," she replied. "We lived near the sea and grew grapes for wine. One day there was a terrible earthquake. My family's land was destroyed. I was sent to live with relatives in Oklahoma. They didn't like that I was living with them, even though it was temporary. Life was so bad that I ran away. I picked a poor moment to run away. A storm blew up. I managed to find a small shelter when a tornado struck. I barely escaped with my life, and saw my relatives' home torn to shreds. I know they were there when it happened, so they were all killed. When the storm was over, I was here.

"There is a cyclone here. It doesn't move, but twirls in one place and never goes away, something like a machine. When I arrived, I was dangerously near the cyclone. The unicorn at the time, Braveheart, saved me. But he perished in the process, so I was never able to return."

"Fury couldn't take you?"

She shook her head. “In our realm unicorns usually live very long lives. Until you become an adult, you can come and go whenever the conditions are right. But once you become an adult, you must choose which realm you want to live in, and your choice becomes final. If anything happens to the unicorn and it dies before you are old enough to make the choice, you are forever bound to the realm you are in when the unicorn dies.”

“How old were you?”

“Fourteen. Kind people took me in and raised me as their own. And then I met Taurek.”

“We have been married these last five years now.”

“That unicorn who died,” Teddy asked tentatively, “was he Fury’s father?”

“He was,” Taurek said. “We don’t speak of it before Fury out of courtesy. You should not speak of it to him, either.”

When their dinner was over, they went outside. Taurek taught Teddy about the stars in their heavens. He pointed out one, called Frem Dexitous.

“That is the star I use to find my way home,” Taurek said. “That one will always point the way.”

Teddy studied the sky and tried to find the various stars and constellations Taurek had shown him. He had often looked at the sky at home. It amazed him that none of the constellations were the same. They didn’t simply have different names; they were totally different.

The breeze grew chilly. Taurek suggested they go in for the night. It was comfortable having the fire, even though it was early summer. He had thought it would make the house hot, but banked it radiated only a small amount of heat so the damp and chill were kept at bay.

As he prepared for bed, he wondered about his mother in the storm cellar. He hoped his father was safe. He wondered how he would get back. What if something happened to Fury? Teddy was their only son.

He fell asleep with those thoughts racing through his head without resolution.

# Chapter 2

"Well, that wasn't as bad as I thought it would be," Mrs. Lyndhurst said.

Teddy sat up and pushed the sleeping bag away from his head.

"Mom? You're here?"

"Yes, of course, Teddy. Where else would I be?"

"Um –"

"Let's get you out of here. The all safe siren just sounded."

Teddy got out of the sleeping bag and looked at his clothes. He was wearing the same things he'd been wearing when he entered the storm cellar.

His mother unlatched the door and pushed it back. Once outside, he looked around. The tornado had cut a swath through the neighborhood, but it looked like it had mainly gone down the street, upending a few trees, and breaking apart several sheds. Their house was undamaged.

Once they went inside the house, Teddy's excitement bubbled out of him.

"Mom, you should've seen it! I went to this really cool place. There was a unicorn named Fury, and he talked to me. Well, he didn't exactly *talk*, it was more like he talked right into my brain without moving his mouth. I got to ride him, and he took me to a crystal castle where the king lives. The king was really nice –"

"Teddy, what are you talking about?"

"When we were in the storm cellar. Somehow I went to this other world."

Mrs. Lyndhurst ruffled his hair. "You have a very good imagination," she said.

"It wasn't imagination, Mom. I really went there. And I stayed overnight in this house with a thatched roof with Hilda and Taurek."

"Hilda and Taurek? Were they adults?"

"Yes."

"And they let you call them by their first names?"

"Yes. They said I was Lord Teddy because I'm from the real world."

"Teddy, we were in the storm cellar for fifteen minutes. How could you do all of those things and stay overnight?"

"They said time moves differently there than it does here."

"And you just stayed with strangers?"

"Fury said it was okay, and Taurek said it was an honor to have me there. They were really nice."

"Teddy, it's nice that you can pretend so well, but you do know that it couldn't really happen, don't you?"

"But it *did*, Mom!"

“And you know you shouldn’t talk to strangers or stay in a stranger’s house, don’t you?”

“I know, Mom, but I was in a different world, and I didn’t know how to get home. I had to trust someone.”

She could see he really believed what he was saying, but she thought the best way to make him let it go was to not make a big deal of out of it.

The electricity was out when they first went into the house, but came back on a short time later. Once it was on, Mrs. Lyndhurst was able to make dinner.

By the time Mr. Lyndhurst arrived home, everything was back to normal. He told them that one area he drove through had not fared as well as their neighborhood, and he’d had to detour around some damage. The city, where he worked, had had no bad weather at all.

Teddy was silent about his adventures. His mother hadn’t believed him. He thought his father would be less likely to believe his adventure. He didn’t want them to think he was crazy, and the more time that passed, the more he wondered whether or not his adventure had actually happened. It had seemed so real, but there were times dreams had felt real, too.

The next morning started bright and sunny. Teddy didn’t know whether or not his mother had mentioned what he’d told her to his father. His dad hadn’t said anything. Usually, he would get a serious look on his face and talk to Teddy about things he didn’t want the boy to do. But his father had said nothing the evening before, and had already left for work by the time Teddy woke up.

Mrs. Lyndhurst was a teacher, so during the summer, she was home. She was a favorite in the sixth grade, but Teddy was pretty sure that she wouldn’t be his teacher in a few years when he reached sixth grade. It was hard enough when other teachers expected him to know all of the answers because his mother was a teacher. He didn’t want his classmates to think he had any advantages by having his mother as his teacher.

Mrs. Lyndhurst was outside weeding the garden in front of their porch when Teddy came downstairs. She had put his bowl and the box of cereal on the table. He poured himself cereal and put milk on it, then walked outside carrying the bowl and eating.

“Mom, can Kenny come over to go swimming today?” he asked.

“Sure, if it’s all right with his mother. Finish your breakfast and your chores first.”

Teddy’s chores consisted of feeding the five chickens and collecting the eggs. His breakfast and chores were easily completed, and then he dashed down the road

to his friend, Kenny's house

Kenny was one of the smaller boys in Teddy's class. Like Teddy, Kenny didn't have a lot of friends. But Kenny was better at sports, so he wasn't as often alone. Still, he wouldn't turn down an invitation to swim in Teddy's pool.

The day was hot with no threat of storms, and the boys played in the water all morning. Mrs. Lyndhurst made them both lunch.

While the boys were eating at the picnic table in the yard, Teddy became serious.

"Kenny, if I tell you something, do you promise you won't tell anyone?"

"Sure."

"This will probably sound kind of weird."

"That's ok. I like weird."

He told Kenny about being in the storm cellar, and suddenly being somewhere else. When he told him about the talking unicorn, Kenny thought that was about the coolest thing he could have seen. Teddy related everything that happened, but unlike his mother, his friend believed him.

"Did you tell your mom?"

"Yeah. She thought I was making it up because we were in the storm cellar as long as I was in the other world."

"But you could do whatever you wanted there?"

"I guess."

"When are you going again?"

"I don't know. I don't know how I got there. Maybe I have to wait for another storm."

"Can I go with you next time?"

"I guess, if you're with me."

It was great to have someone believe him. It had hurt that his own mother thought he had made it all up. He'd gladly take Kenny if he could. It might be safer to have a friend with him. And perhaps people would believe him if both of them saw these wonders.

Summer meandered along with mainly hot, sunny days and occasional rainy ones. There was the odd thunder storm, but no tornadoes in their part of the state. That was good news for the farmers whose crops ripened in abundance.

Teddy sometimes helped Mr. Turner, one of their neighbors, bring in the corn. Ted liked nothing better than to run through the rows of corn pretending he was lost in a giant maze.

Kenny kept close for a few weeks, but when no sign of a tornado came, he became bored and returned to playing baseball with the other boys. He did still

sometimes make time for Teddy.

Teddy didn't mind. Kenny didn't have much of an imagination. Teddy was just as happy that there were no tornadoes. They frightened him, and when he thought about it, being thrust into a strange land was almost as scary. Talking unicorns? Yeah, he could understand why his mother didn't believe him. It was a little strange that Kenny did.

The summer wound down, and Mrs. Lyndhurst was busy with plans and meetings for school. Teddy had to go with her one day while she set up her classroom and prepared September bulletin boards.

The freshly waxed floors were shiny and gave off an odd smell. A few rooms had been painted, and the combination of smells reminded him of Mr. Neuland's hardware store when it first opened, and everything smelled of paint and plastic. At least they were only at school half the day. The other half day was spent shopping for new clothes for the coming year as well as a new backpack, pencils, paper, and art supplies.

That night Teddy dreamed about drawing a unicorn in art class and having it come to life to take him to the other world. When he woke up, though, everything was the same as it had been the day before.

# Chapter 3

The first day of school wasn't the typical hot, still-summer day. It was hot and humid, but overcast. Teddy couldn't remember a gloomier start of school.

The air felt odd, and a constant warm breeze blew. The sky looked a threatening grey-green, and the weather forecaster on the morning news said conditions were right for possible funnel clouds throughout the area.

Teddy hoped there wouldn't be a tornado. His mother taught in the middle school across town, and having both parents somewhere he couldn't reach them was still a scary thought, even in fourth grade.

His teacher, Mr. Bloom, had everyone seated in a short time, and let them talk quietly while he gave out books. Then he lined everyone up and took them to the lavatories they would use in the fourth grade hall, letting three or four in at a time, and having them line up on the other side of the hall when they had finished and filled their water bottles. Once everyone had completed this, they quickly returned to the classroom for snack time. Then Mr. Bloom began to teach math.

Mr. Bloom was very good at reminding everyone what they had learned the year before, giving them practice problems before teaching something new. They were so focused on what he was teaching that no one noticed how much the sky had darkened, or that it had started to rain.

Mr. Bloom had finished math and moved on to reading when the principal, Mrs. Fenway, came on the loudspeaker with an announcement.

"Boys and girls, the sirens have sounded. Everyone is to line up quietly and go out into the hallway."

A few of his classmates gasped or cried out briefly. Teddy felt too scared to make a sound.

"Quickly, everyone," Mr. Bloom said.

He guided his class out into the hallway that was filling with students from other rooms. Some went into the bathrooms for shelter. Teddy was one of the students in the bathroom. The children in the hallway sat facing the walls, some with their hands clasped on their heads, a few with their empty backpacks on their heads. A few from the younger classes were whimpering, and their teachers spoke softly to them, trying to calm them.

In the silence of the hallway, they could hear the sirens in the town. The rain fell harder and sounded like hail hitting the roof. Before long the wind blew harder, and they heard a long whoosh while things hit the sides of the school. Down the hall a window broke in one of the classrooms.

Teddy, in the bathroom stall, didn't hear as much of the noise as the children in the hall did. Terrified, he closed his eyes, whispering, "Please don't let me die; please don't let me die," over and over.

"Why would you think you will die?" asked a voice, familiar yet not anyone from school.

Teddy opened his eyes. The bathroom was gone. He was once again in the field, and Fury stood beside him.

"I'm back!"

"Hilda was surprised that you were gone the morning after you arrived last time. But that is the way of things."

"I'm sorry."

"No need to apologize. We do not control your coming and going."

"Who does?"

The unicorn gazed at him. "You do. It's probably nothing you can control. But it comes from you."

"A tornado was coming. I was at school."

Fury nodded. "Much has happened since you were here."

"Will I get to go to the solstice party?"

"Ah, that was four years ago, and you have returned to us at a different time of year."

Teddy looked around. The grass looked lighter, and the trees were just flowering.

"Four years?"

"Yes. Hilda and Taurek have two children now. Sven was born at the end of the year you were here. He is four. Altha, his sister, is two."

"So, I guess I can't stay with them. There won't be any room."

"Oh, but you can! They have done well for themselves, and have added on to their house. Hilda has started raising bees, and sells the honey. The children have heard about you and would love to meet you. Hilda and Taurek would be honored if you would stay with them."

Teddy climbed onto Fury's back once again and they rode to Taurek and Hilda's home. Both were thrilled to see Teddy again, and they introduced him to Sven and Altha. Sven was a sturdy-looking boy with blond hair like his father's. He had large brown eyes. By nature he was very friendly, and he approached Teddy to study him for a moment.

"Must I call you Lord Teddy?" he asked.

"No. Teddy is fine. I don't think I'd much like being called Lord Teddy all the time."

Altha was still a toddler. She had brown hair like her mother, and green eyes. She was shy with Teddy, and tended to cling to her mother's leg.

"Hello, Altha," Teddy said, squatting down to her height. At first she hid her face, but then she peeked at him and said hello.

He smiled at her and she suddenly started prattling to him with her baby words. She showed him a bracelet she was wearing, and when he told her it was pretty, she grabbed his hand and pulled him off his feet in her excitement to show him something outside.

When he stood up, she took his hand and led him outside. Once there, she showed him a lamb that was apparently hers.

"Nova," she said.

"Nova? Is that the lamb's name?" he asked. She nodded.

After a few minutes, she lost interest in Teddy and went off to play with the lamb. Teddy returned to the house.

The children had bedrooms in the newer section of the house. Teddy's room had been changed somewhat in order to add to the house, making it a little smaller, but he didn't really need much. After changing into the regular clothes in the wardrobe, he went out with Fury to see things he hadn't seen before.

It was spring. Flowers were blooming and all the bushes were a light shade of green. Unlike the heat at home, it was cool here, with a fresh breeze. As they travelled, Teddy noticed that breeze had gradually turned into a harder wind, yet the sky remained blue with white, puffy clouds.

"Where are we going?" Teddy asked.

"To see the cyclone," Fury said.

"I don't want to see it!"

"You are safe, Teddy. As long as you keep your distance, you won't be hurt. Remember, this one doesn't move from the one spot."

"Why do I need to see it?"

"To know where it is. That way you can avoid it. It is important to know your enemy."

They travelled along a path across the meadow and through the woodland. Here and there in the woods they saw small huts. Fury explained that these were the houses of the woodsmen, guardians of the forest. They looked after the animals, sometimes cut down trees and rescued those who were lost or hurt.

"Do many people get lost in the woods?" Teddy asked.

"Sometimes. Villagers don't know the woods well. Sometimes, if they wander off the trail they may lose their way."

When he first entered the woods, Teddy thought it would take all day to get through it. The woods came to a sudden end, and the open land gently sloped down. What looked like a black smudge at first, gradually took shape as they came closer to it.

They reached the bottom of the hill. A little distance away they saw it clearly: the cyclone. It looked like a column about as tall as a skyscraper and as wide as a merry-go-round. It made a rumbling sound that Teddy could feel vibrating through the ground. There was also an occasional hiss.

Teddy stood staring at it, certain it would do something. It simply revolved. If the wind knocked something into it, the object was sucked in, never to be seen again. A large item would make a clattering sound for a few moments before eventually being blown out again in broken pieces.

"As you see, it won't hurt you unless you go too close," Fury said.

"But what is it for?"

Fury looked confused.

"What does it do?" Teddy asked.

"It does what you see."

"But what is its *purpose*?" Teddy asked, feeling frustrated that Fury didn't know what he meant.

"I truly don't know. I don't know that anyone does."

They left the area, wandering down along the flat lands. They came to a slight incline in the land, and as they reached the top, they heard the whoosh of the sea. Just a little below them water lapped the sand, coming in in waves and then returning.

Teddy had never been to the ocean. He was fascinated.

"Is it safe?" he asked.

"The water will not harm you unless you cannot swim. Then you will drown," Fury said.

Teddy slid off Fury, sat on the sandy ground to take off his shoes and socks, and approached the water. As he stood on the wet part of the beach, a wave washed over his feet and ankles. It was cold. He'd forgotten it was only spring here. He didn't realize how cold the ocean could be.

After the cold water hit his feet once more, Teddy backed away from the shoreline and put his socks and shoes back on. He was glad he was here with Fury. His mother wouldn't have let him put his feet in the sea when it wasn't warm enough to go swimming.

They headed off again, back toward the village. It surprised Teddy how quickly they arrived, considering how long it had taken them to get to the cyclone. They

hadn't even gone through the woods.

Teddy met several of the village children. They were anxious to meet him. Several were his age. They invited him to play with them.

Teddy was afraid these children would soon discover his poor performance at sports and abandon him, as the boys in his neighborhood did. To his surprise, they played a game that was fairly simple, and they were patient with him as he learned it.

The game was somewhat like hopscotch, but rather than connected squares in a straight line, this game was drawn in a large circle. Teddy proved to be quite good at it, to the delight of the other children.

Too soon it was time to go in to dinner. Teddy promised to see the children the next day if he was still there, and entered Taurek's house, where Hilda was just putting dinner on the table.

Over their meal Teddy caught up with everything that had happened since his last visit. The children showed him their prized possessions, and showed him the various things they could do.

Soon, it was time for bed. Teddy hugged each of them in turn, saying he hoped to see them the next day. He didn't know whether or not he'd wake up here or back at school. Then he went to his room and quickly fell asleep.

In the morning he awoke to giggles and someone shushing the children who were giggling. For a moment, Teddy was afraid something had happened at school to make the other children laugh, but as he looked around, he discovered he was still at Taurek's house, in the bed he'd slept in the night before. He stretched and got out of bed.

The children were apparently playing a game in the main room, giggling and dropping something that thumped. Teddy quickly dressed and went out to the main room to discover what they were doing.

"I hope they didn't wake you, Lord Teddy," Hilda said.

"No," he replied, looking at the children, who stopped to stare at him as he entered. "But please, just call me Teddy."

Hilda curtsied and then went to put some bread on a griddle to toast by the fire.

"What are you playing?" Teddy asked.

"I'm trying to teach Altha how to catch," Sven said.

He had a small leather ball. He tossed it to his sister, but only after it hit the floor did she put her hands out to catch it.

"Maybe if you and I throw it back and forth, she'll get the idea," Teddy suggested.

Sven agreed, and the two boys threw the ball back and forth. Altha ran from one to the other, trying to catch it before they did. Finally, the boys sat on the floor and Altha sat in front of Teddy. He reached around and took her hands. When Sven threw the ball, Teddy pushed Altha's hands together to catch the ball. She laughed, thrilled to finally catch it. When the two-year-old threw it back, the ball went well past her brother, showing she was no better at throwing than catching.

"Come, children. It's time for breakfast," Hilda said.

They all gathered at the table, and she gave each a plate with interesting-looking marbled bread with honey poured over it. Teddy cut his up and tasted it. It was similar to French toast.

Even though Hilda had cut Altha's up in tiny pieces, the child still had more on her face than in her mouth when she was finished.

When they had finished, Hilda told Teddy that Fury was ready to take him wherever he needed to go. Teddy didn't really need to go anywhere, but he went outside to see what plans the unicorn might have for the day.

Fury told Teddy that the king wished to see him, and off they rode to the castle. This time the way looked familiar, and Teddy felt more confident about meeting the king.

He was led into a small room where the king sat at a desk, writing. He looked up when the door opened and Teddy was announced.

"Lord Teddy, welcome!" the king said, standing and approaching the boy.

"Your Majesty," Teddy replied, bowing. He didn't know how he knew how to behave in front of a king; he just did.

"Sit down, please," the king said as if he and Teddy were long-time pals instead of a man and a boy. Teddy sat in a comfortable chair that looked like it belonged in someone's living room. The king sat in one just like it.

"How do you like the kingdom?" the king asked.

"It's pretty cool. I have some friends here already."

"But of course you do! I wondered if you would like to see one of our ceremonies."

"Yes, I would," he replied, thinking it was odd he was being asked instead of ordered.

"My son, Prince Alexander will turn 21 tomorrow. He is to be knighted. I know he would love to have you come, if you are still here."

"Yes, Your Majesty. I'd really like to see that."

"Excellent!"

"Will you give him that sword?"

"You've seen it?"

“The blacksmith was still making it. I saw part of it, and he told me about what it would look like when it was done. But that was the first time I was here.”

“Ah, that was his first sword. He has that already. This is to be an even greater sword.”

“Has he fought any battles?”

“Nay, we are at peace. But you will get to see him joust.”

“Joust?”

“Ah, you would not know. It is a mock battle on horseback. Anyone attempting it without the proper training could be killed.”

“Father, I –” said a tall, muscular young man with blond hair who entered the room without knocking. “Oh, I’m sorry. No one told me anyone was here.”

“Teddy,” the king said, “this is my son, Prince Alexander.”

Teddy stood and bowed. “Your highness,” he said.

“This is Lord Teddy?” Alexander asked, sounding as if he thought Teddy was far more important than a prince or a king.

“Indeed,” said the king.

“I’m happy to make your acquaintance,” Alexander said. “I do hope you’ll come to the knighting ceremony.”

“I hope to. I hope I’ll still be here,” Teddy said, thinking a knighting ceremony was far more important than Social Studies class.

“What was it you wanted?” the king asked Alexander.

“I was just wondering if anyone had heard from Lord Teddy, actually.”

They invited Teddy to share a light meal they were about to have. Lunch with a king and a prince was definitely better than Social Studies.

They ate in a small room. A polished table in the middle held plates and goblets. The queen and her two daughters, Princess Christine and Princess Elaine were already seated.

Queen Audra sat at the head of the table by the window. The sunlight shining through made her golden hair seem to glow. She wore a blue silk outfit, with dark blue trousers and a light blue tunic. She looked younger than Teddy’s mother, even though her three children were all older than he was.

Christine had dark hair that hung down her back, and large, brown eyes. She was dressed like her mother, but her trousers were red and her tunic, pink. She looked nearly Alexander’s age.

Elaine looked closest to Teddy’s age. She was probably about 12. She had light brown hair and blue eye. Her outfit consisted of dark green trousers and a pale green tunic.  She smiled, while Christine looked serious.

All of them smiled when they saw Teddy. They stood as the king entered and took his place at the opposite end of the table from the queen. Once the king sat, so did everyone else. Teddy sat across from Alexander.

"Welcome, Teddy," the queen said, smiling. "It is good that you are here."

They asked him about his home realm, and told him of preparations for the next day while footmen served a meal that looked a little bit like pizza, but they ate it with knives and forks. They drank something fizzy, although it didn't taste like any sodas he was used to. Teddy tried to do whatever they did.

Alexander was very friendly toward Teddy. The queen asked questions about his mother and father, and about his school. She was interested in what sorts of things he studied. Christine watched and listened, but said nothing. Elaine acted a bit shy, as if she wanted to ask questions as Alexander did, but was trying to appear more mature, like Christine. Occasionally, Elaine asked about some subject Teddy had mentioned that she didn't know.

When lunch was finished, they left the room for the servants to clean up. The girls said they had riding lessons and Alexander walked with Teddy to the entrance hall. The king and queen had to see some of their subjects that were getting things ready for the next day's festivities.

"I really hope you can come to my knighting. I think you'll like it, and there will be lots of fun events. It won't all be ceremony," Alexander said.

"I hope I can be there, too."

They parted company, Fury coming to take Teddy back to the village.

Teddy spent the rest of his time until dinner playing with the village children, as he had done the day before. Then he had dinner with Taurek and his family.

Hilda was very excited for Teddy. He was fortunate to be invited to the knighthood ceremony. Teddy was afraid to be excited, since he didn't know whether or not he'd still be in the realm when the next day arrived.

Hilda tried to teach him all of the courtesies she knew, such as how to address various members of the king's court. The thing that upset her, however, was what Teddy could give to the prince as a gift. They had nothing fit in their home, and Teddy had nothing from his own realm.

Shortly after they had finished their meal, someone knocked on the door. Taurek opened it to find Raneesh standing there with something wrapped in a cloth in his hands.

"Forgive me, Taurek, but I had heard the Lord Teddy is to attend Prince Alexander's knighting. I thought perhaps he would need a gift."

"Come in, Raneesh," Taurek said.

Raneesh entered the house and greeted Hilda.

“You are a gift from the gods!” Taurek said. “Indeed, we were just discussing what Lord Teddy could bring.”

“If I may,” Raneesh said, and placed an item wrapped in a cloth bag on the table. He unwrapped it to show a goblet of silver with gems around the base, and scrollwork around the bowl.

“This must have cost much to make,” Taurek said.

“All of the villagers contributed to the cost. It is our hope that Lord Teddy will consent to give it from himself and all of us in the village,” Raneesh said.

“Of course I will!” Teddy said.

“That was kind of you, Raneesh. It is a beautiful piece. I’m sure the prince will treasure it,” Hilda said.

Raneesh beamed, and then bowed slightly.

“I will not disturb you further. I’m sure you have much to do to prepare for tomorrow.”

“Will you not stay and have some refreshment?” Hilda asked.

“Nay. I have only just finished my evening meal. I only wanted to give this to Lord Teddy to take to the prince.”

With that, Raneesh left their home.

Everyone gathered around the table to look at the goblet. It was one of Raneesh’s best works, and he was a master at his craft. Perhaps it was his very best. The firelight reflected on the gems in the base and stem. The silver gleamed. Teddy had never seen anything so beautiful.

“It is a proud moment,” Taurek said. We have been given the care of Lord Teddy, and he is to give, perhaps, the choicest gift to the prince.”

Hilda re-wrapped the goblet, and placed it in a small cabinet behind a panel in the wall. Teddy had never noticed the panel before.

Soon, it was time for bed. Teddy thought he’d never fall asleep, given the excitement for the next day crossed with fear that he would no longer be there the next day. But before long, he was sleeping soundly, his dreams filled with knights and jousts.

In the morning he quickly looked around him. He was reassured to find himself still in Taurek’s house.

Hilda had laid out the special outfit, and the polished boots stood beside his bed. He dressed carefully. Teddy was surprised by how comfortable the boots were He expected they’d be stiff, and he wouldn’t like them.

When he had finished dressing, he went out to the main room. Taurek, Hilda and the children looked at him as if they were looking at a prince.

“The only one I’ve ever seen look as handsome was Taurek on our wedding day,” Hilda declared.

“I wish I had my camera with me. I’d love to have a picture to show my friends,” Teddy said.

“A camera?” Taurek asked, unfamiliar with the term. “I don’t know what that is.”

“It’s like a box. You push a button on it and it takes your picture.”

“Like a portrait.” Hilda said.

“Only it’s not made with paint. If only I knew when I’d end up here, I could make sure I had things like that so I could show you.”

“Your world must be wonderful indeed,” Taurek said. “I’m sure Sven would love to go there someday, if only it were possible.”

“I promised a friend I’d take him here with me, but he wasn’t near me when I left.”

Taurek scowled. “That is not possible, Teddy. You are the chosen one, and no one else may use your gift. I don’t know what might befall you if you tried.

Kenny wouldn’t be happy to hear that, but there was nothing Teddy could do.

Fury arrived with a leather bridle and a saddle with fanciful creatures stamped into the leather. Under the saddle was an ornately woven blanket. His horn sparkled like an icicle, with an array of colors embedded in it.

Teddy climbed onto the unicorn’s back. Once he was settled, Taurek handed him the bag containing the goblet. He hung it from the saddle’s pommel. The family waved to him as Fury trotted off toward the castle.

As they trotted through the town, people stopped what they were doing and cheered. Children who had played with Teddy ran after the unicorn for a while before turning back.

“I forgot to ask,” Teddy said, suddenly remembering something just as they began to canter through the fields.

“What is it, Lord Teddy?” Fury asked.

“I am to give the goblet in the name of the townspeople, but I don’t know the name of the town.”

“That is answered simply enough. The town is called Robspeillen.”

“I hope I can remember that when the time comes,” Teddy said.

“You will,” Fury replied confidently.

The day was pleasant, the sun shining, with high, puffy clouds floating past occasionally. As always, a breeze kept the weather from being too warm.

As they reached the castle, Fury did not bring Teddy to the front gates as he usually did. Instead, they went around to a side entrance with huge wooden doors.

The doors were open, admitting crowds of people on foot as well as those on horseback and in carriages to the castle grounds.

The walls around the grounds were decorated in garlands, and a different flag flew from each turret. Like Teddy, everyone was dressed in the finest clothes. People greeted one another, and it didn't matter if they were rich or poor. There was no sense of one group of people being better than another. Some were knights; some were simple townsfolk. All were welcome.

When they arrived at the point on the lawn where the festivities were to be held, Fury stopped, and Teddy dismounted. People greeted him as he walked along the path to where the royal family was seated. Some people wished him good health while others thanked him for coming.

As he reached the royal family, he knelt.

"Your Majesties," he said, "the town of Robspeillen asked me to present this gift to the prince as a remembrance of his knighthood."

He held out the bag with the goblet in it. The prince stepped forward and took it.

"I thank you, and I thank the people of Robspeillen," Prince Alexander said. "Arise, Lord Teddy."

Teddy stood, not knowing where the words he had spoken had come from.

Alexander had Teddy sit to his left side. The prince opened the bag and removed the goblet. Many gasped at its beauty.

"Such a creation is a great masterpiece. Raneesh is, indeed, a gifted craftsman."

"You know Raneesh?" Teddy asked, surprised.

"Indeed, I do. He made my sword for me. I understand he has made another for me, a ceremonial sword, to mark this day. But Flame Biter will always be my defensive weapon."

He passed the goblet to his parents, who examined the vessel with approval.

The prince did not open all of the gifts, and he was not expected to. He showed off a few to the awaiting crowds, pledging his gratitude to all.

Finally, it was time for the knighting ceremony. Alexander was presented with his armor, his helm and his shield bearing his coat of arms: two unicorns rampant on a field of blue facing each other, their horns crossed.

After he had been knighted, a ceremony that lasted a shorter period of time than Teddy expected, his father presented him with the new sword, which he named Peace-bringer. The crowd cheered. Teddy felt proud to be in such fine company.

Several other knights were there that day. Now that the ceremony was over, they all prepared for the jousts.

"Lord Teddy, come joust with us," the prince said.

"I can't. I don't know how. Besides, I don't have armor."

“I’m sure we have something that will fit you. And Fury will guide you.”

At this, the king stepped in. “Nay, Alexander, I cannot allow that. I know you mean well, but you must remember Lord Teddy is from another realm, and does not know the jousts as we do. Besides, we cannot risk endangering Fury by putting him in the lists. Should anything happen to him, Lord Teddy could never return to his own realm. He is not yet of an age to make that decision.

Alexander nodded and went off to join the other knights.

“My queen and I would be delighted if you would join us to watch the joust.”

Teddy smiled. He never expected to sit with royalty for the event.

Everything that day thrilled Teddy. Watching the knights line up on horseback at opposite ends of the lists – a long, narrow field divided by a sort of fence, with the two opposing knights charging toward each other on opposite sides of the fence – Teddy wondered if they were allowed to defeat the prince. He had his answer soon enough. While Alexander won his first test, the second knight he rode against knocked him from his horse. On horseback they had used lances, but once standing on solid ground they met in a square away from the lists and fought with swords.

Teddy noticed the prince did not use the new ceremonial sword, but the one he’d been given for his 18th birthday, Flame Biter.

The prince fought valiantly, showing his excellent skill with the sword, but he was no match for the larger, stronger knight who managed to pin him to the ground at sword point.

“I yield,” Alexander said. The other knight raised his sword, turned to face the king, and saluted. Then he reached out his hand and helped the prince to his feet.

Alexander was more successful in his other encounters, and he was generous in his congratulations of other knights when they went against one another.

As the sunlight faded, the joust ended, and the feast at long last began. There had been food available during the joust: fruits, drinks and tiny sandwiches, sweets and sausage rolls and a variety of things he couldn’t identify. Still, he was ravenous by the time the feast began.

Alexander sat with Teddy and explained the various fighting techniques.

“Of course, at a joust, no one is injured beyond a few bruises, and no one is killed. It is only for sport, and everything is dulled. But it prepares us in case we should ever have to go to war. I could teach you how to use a sword if you like.”

“I would. I just don’t know how long I’ll be here.”

“The offer stands, whenever you are here.”

The revelry and feasting lasted late into the night, but finally came to an end. Teddy made plans to visit Alexander the next day for sword lessons.

“I’ll understand if you’re not here, but I hope you will be,” Alexander said.

Fury took the tired boy back to the village, where he went to bed as soon as he arrived at Taurek's house.

# Chapter 4

"Where's Teddy?" the teacher asked Kenny.

"I don't know. Probably went to visit the land of the unicorns."

Several boys laughed as they returned to the classroom.

"Kenny, you're funny," one boy said.

"I'm just telling you what Teddy told me. He was supposed to take me, but he didn't."

"Do you really believe that?"

Kenny laughed. "No, but Teddy does."

Meanwhile, Teddy awoke to find himself in the boys' bathroom. He heard the other boys talking as they left the bathroom, and the teachers in the hall telling the students to go to their classrooms quietly. Teddy left the bathroom with the other boys, and returned to his classroom.

Mr. Bloom returned to the social studies lesson. Teddy looked at the clock and realized that only 10 minutes had passed since the sirens started ringing. This would be a long day.

When lunch time finally came, he stood in line with his classmates to buy lunch.

"Hey, Teddy, see any unicorns lately?" one boy asked. Several others laughed.

"What?" Teddy asked, pretending to be confused. "Unicorns aren't real. Did you get hit in the head or something?"

Now the laughter turned on the boy who had made the comment.

"It's what Kenny said," the boy replied.

"Well, if Kenny thinks he knows where there are unicorns, maybe he should bring one to school," Teddy replied. Now that he knew he couldn't bring anyone with him, he thought it best not to let anyone know about the kingdom of Blevny.

After school Kenny caught up with Teddy as they got off the bus.

"Why did you tell people I believed in unicorns?" Kenny asked Teddy.

"Why did you tell people *I* did? You weren't supposed to tell anyone what I said."

"Did you go back there?"

"How could I? I was in school. It was just a story. It just seemed very real when I dreamed it."

"I don't believe you," Kenny said.

Teddy shrugged and walked to his house.

"How was your day?" his mother asked. She had arrived home a few minutes before Teddy did. He took the bus because some days she stayed later at school, and he didn't want to have to wait there.

“It was okay. Did the tornado come near your school?” he asked.

“Yes, close. There was some damage to some of the stores nearby. I heard it didn’t get close to yours. I’m glad.”

The middle school Mrs. Lyndhurst worked in was a few miles from Teddy’s elementary school.

Mrs. Lyndhurst asked about Teddy’s teacher. He was new to the district, so she didn’t know him. Teddy thought he was all right.

Teddy had a little bit of homework, so he worked on that before dinner. When his father came home, he also asked about Teddy’s day.

“There was a tornado near our school,” Mrs. Lyndhurst said. “Fortunately, it didn’t go near the elementary school.”

I don’t like that it went near either school,” Mr. Lyndhurst said.

Mr. Lyndhurst was tall, with a slender build and light brown hair that curled if he let it get long. Teddy remembered when he was very small, his dad wore it long. Now it was short on the back and sides, and a bit longer on top. People said Teddy looked like his father. Teddy was glad because if he looked like him, maybe he acted like him, too, and most people he knew liked Mr. Lyndhurst a great deal.

Mrs. Lyndhurst was a few inches shorter than her husband, with dark hair and deep blue eyes. Normally quiet, she could make her students quake when necessary. Teddy thought his personality was probably a mix of both parents’.

“Maybe we should move,” Teddy said.

“Move? Why?” Mrs. Lyndhurst asked.

“Wouldn’t it be nice to live somewhere without tornadoes?”

“I would like that,” Mr. Lyndhurst said, “ but your mother’s and my jobs are here.”

“But there are teachers everywhere. And couldn’t you work for a different company?”

Mr. Lyndhurst worked for a company that made chemicals for other companies.

“Teddy, you can’t just quit a job and find something else. I’m the head chemist here. I grew up in this part of the world.”

“But other places don’t have tornadoes.”

“That’s true. They may have hurricanes or earthquakes instead. I like the people here, too. In other places there may be more crime, and things might be more expensive.”

Teddy looked down and sighed. His father ruffled his hair and tried to sound comforting.

“I know it’s difficult for you right now, but in a few years you’ll beg me not to change jobs and move somewhere else.”

Teddy doubted that. He couldn't imagine ever not minding tornadoes. He didn't just worry about what might happen to him or worry about coming home to find the house gone. He worried that something would happen to his parents and he'd have no way of knowing. They were all in different parts of town during the day. When the siren sounded, he worried because they were cut off from one another.

At least when they were home together he had the comfort of knowing they'd either survive together or they would all die. It never occurred to him that one might be fine, another injured and the third killed.

Teddy kept his fears to himself, just as he kept the realm of the unicorn, the kingdom of Blevny, to himself. He didn't need anyone teasing him more than they already did.

Tornado season finally ended. Teddy was able to relax and not worry about what the weather would bring. Winter snow didn't bother him. He looked forward to playing in the snow and days off from school.

School wasn't difficult for him, and after the first few days beyond the last tornado, the other boys forgot about what Kenny had said.

Teddy continued to be a bit of a loner. He played with the other boys at times, but still preferred his books. They provided him with stories that took him to places like the ones he had seen with Fury. His friends also depended on him for help with homework.

He turned ten just before the school year ended. Several of his classmates came to his house for a party. The day was sunny and they had the party outside in his yard.

Teddy should have been happy, but some foreboding kept him from relaxing. Perhaps it was that his birthday came at the beginning of tornado season that made him uneasy. Still, the day was fine and he tried to enjoy it.

"Did you ever go back to that land with the unicorn in it?" Kenny asked when he had a moment with Teddy away from the other boys.

"I told you before, I just made it up."

Kenny nodded, but Teddy didn't think his friend believed him.

Although Kenny didn't ask any more about it, his question made Teddy start to think about Fury. He wondered about the prince and what might be happening in the kingdom. As much as he wanted to go back, he didn't want the fear that a tornado threat brought.

The summer that year was mainly hot and sunny. They seldom had rain. A few thunderstorms occurred, but the tornadoes kept to neighboring states. He wondered

as he sat in the tree whether some other child visited with the prince. He thought that was probably the way things were. While he couldn't bring a companion with him, he suspected that as long it was one child at a time, Fury could entertain others from the real world. It was a shame it took a tornado to get to Fury's world.

As time passed and no tornadoes came, Teddy began to doubt the reality of Fury's world. It must have been his fear and an over-active imagination, as his mother believed. Kenny thought he was a liar. Teddy didn't know what to believe.

A year passed and a second without any significant tornado threats. Teddy's father showed no trace of looking for a job somewhere else. By the time Teddy was 12, all thoughts of unicorns had vanished.

The idea of sword-fighting had stayed in his imagination, and his parents let him take fencing lessons. Dressed in his white fencer's jacket and mask, holding a foil in his hand, Teddy could pretend he was a knight like the ones he'd read about in novels. While his parents had their doubts about Teddy's athletic ability, for once he'd proven he had the speed, coordination and determination for this sport. He didn't need to be picked for a team. He could rely on his own skill. Pitted one-on-one against another fencer, he shone.

By the time he was 13, Teddy was growing into a tall, lithe teenager. He showed the confidence his fencing skill had given him.

Teddy had always done well in school. Having a teacher for a mom didn't hurt, either. One day in Language Arts class the teacher had asked them to write about something they enjoyed, and how they would use it as an adult. Teddy started to write about fencing. He intended to make it a story about someday fencing in the Olympics, but somehow the story had gotten away from him. He wrote about participating in a joust with his friend, Prince Alexander. What started out as a friendly competition between the prince's companions and that of a rival prince from another country quickly became a battle for survival. Teddy and Alexander barely came out victorious.

Although Teddy didn't think he followed his teacher's directions very well, she was impressed.

"I see you've decided to tell us by showing, Teddy. Your fencing has given you ideas for stories and you're planning on being a writer. How unique."

He was stunned. That wasn't what he'd intended at all, but he wasn't going to throw away a good grade by telling Miss Evans she was wrong.

Kenny caught up with Teddy after class.

"Prince Alexander was that prince in the fantasy land you went to, wasn't he?" Kenny asked.

"What? Oh, was it? I don't remember."

“Have you ever gone back?”

“Ken, I told you ages ago, it was just a story.”

Kenny nodded He acted like he wanted to believe, wanted to have the chance to see Fury and the realm Ted had described to him. Teddy wished his sometime friend would just let it go.

They’d been lucky. There had been no tornadoes in their town in a few years. Neighboring towns had experienced them, but Teddy had been spared.

Good luck didn’t last forever. Two days after Teddy’s 14th birthday, the security of knowing Fury’s world wasn’t real came to an end.

All day the weather had been rainy, with wind whipping at anything not tied down. By the end of his school day the rain had stopped, but the sky continued to darken, turning an almost greenish hue.

Off in the distance the clouds looked like they were dipping to touch the ground. Teddy just wanted to get home.

When the bus stopped at his street, he breathed a sigh of relief that he wouldn’t be on the bus if anything happened. He ran to his house just as the warning siren sounded. His mother wasn’t home yet from school, so he dashed into the storm shelter alone, and locked the door behind him. He’d never been there by himself before. He’d forgotten in the tornado-free years how terrifying the funnel clouds could be. He dove into the sleeping bag as the wind rattled the locked door.

# Chapter 5

The rattling quieted to a hum like a loud engine. Curious, he sat up and saw the tall, spinning cyclone several yards away. He was back!

Teddy looked around and everything looked as it had the last time he was here. He wondered idly where Fury was when he saw the unicorn come over the rise of land near the woods. If unicorns could smile, Teddy would have said Fury was smiling.

"It is good, indeed, to see you," Fury said. "It has been many years. I thought I might not ever see you again."

Teddy stood up and approached Fury, staying well away from the cyclone.

"I'm glad to be back," he said, and mounted the unicorn. He found it much easier to do with his taller stature.

"You have grown much," Fury said.

"You look well," Teddy replied.

"You will be pleased with the family," Fury said. "Sven works on his father's ship now. He is to be married in a few days."

"Married? How old is he?"

"Nearly 30. High time. He has spent his years since his schooling finished learning the fishing trade and the proper handling of ships."

"Are Taurek and Hilda very old then?"

He noticed they took the path through the woods to the village.

"Not so very old. Taurek is nearly 50, and Hilda is a year younger."

"And their daughter?"

"Altha is married. She has a daughter, Birgid, and twin sons, Garth and Leif."

"And the prince?" Teddy asked.

"King Alexander, you mean? He is married and has a son about your age, Prince Erik, and a younger son, Prince Ranulf. Queen Laeta is expecting another child. They hope it will be a girl."

They rode on in silence until they emerged from the woods. As soon as they arrived at the town, people stopped their work and conversation. Children raced to where Fury stood, and everyone cheered Lord Teddy's return.

People he had played with now had their own children. One woman stared at him, and he thought she looked vaguely familiar. Then he realized it was Altha. He slid from Fury's back and dashed up to her. Both were about the same height now, and he embraced her.

"Altha, it's good to see you."

She looked very like her mother now, and she blushed and curtsied when he released her.

“Lord Teddy, this is my daughter Birgid.”

“Hello, Birgid,” he said, shaking hands with the four-year-old.

“Hello Lawd Teddy,” she said, trying to curtsey as her mother had. She reminded Teddy of Altha the first time he saw her. Beside Altha a carriage with two seats held two little boys.

“These are my sons.”

“They look lively,” he replied.

“Come, you must see my mother,” Altha said. She led him to the old homestead, and he greeted old friends along the way. It was odd seeing them all so much older than he was.

Hilda was beyond happy when Teddy entered the house. She kissed him and looked him over as if he were her own son returned from a journey.

“Haven’t you grown tall!” she said. “Taurek and Sven are away on the boat, but will return tonight. I suppose you’ve heard Sven is to be married?” Teddy nodded. “Yes, of course, Fury is such a gossip,” she replied.

Teddy laughed. The image of Fury standing in a group of horses whispering gossip about the townsfolk struck him as hilarious.

The three sat around the table while Birgid played on the floor with her doll, and the boys slept in the carriage.

“I rely on Fury to keep me informed,” Teddy said.

“And what of you?”

“I’ve been taking fencing lessons.”

“Indeed?” Hilda asked. “They do sword play in your realm?”

“For sport.”

“Ah, the king will be proud of you!”

They chatted about Sven’s apprenticeship and how only last year did he become a full mate on the ship. He was making his way in the world. The women expressed a hope that Teddy would be there for the wedding. Somehow, he felt he would.

They asked Teddy about his life, and he told them he had more friends now since he started practicing with swords.

“I didn’t know there were solitary people like me before,” he said.

Mother and daughter glanced at each other.

“You are very amiable, Lord Teddy. People here like you very much,” Hilda said.

“Of course, now that you have many friends in your own world, you may not come here anymore,” Altha said.

“That’s not true!” Teddy replied. “I like it here.”

Both women smiled, and they told him of his former play fellows, and how the old king had died peacefully in his sleep. They spoke of what a good king Alexander was. Time slipped easily as they spoke, and Sven and Taurek entering the house surprised them all.

“Lord Teddy, as I live and breathe!” Taurek exclaimed.

The menfolk hugged and Hilda scurried about to get dinner ready. Altha took Birgid and the boys home to get dinner made for her own family.

The meal was jolly, with Sven and Taurek taking turns telling tales of their latest sea adventure. Hilda still looked at her husband with joy, and showed a mother’s pride in her son. Teddy noticed that Sven had grown tall, but remained lanky, with strong muscles, but not the bulk in them his father had.

It amazed Teddy how much time had passed. His friends were now so much older than he, and some of their children were nearly his age.

Soon it was time for bed, and Teddy fell, exhausted, into the bed. He was asleep almost before his head hit the pillow.

Morning came, and Teddy was still in Blevny. He dressed and went out to the main room where Hilda prepared breakfast.

“A messenger from the king arrived a short while ago,” she said. “The king wishes to see you at your earliest convenience.”

He ate his breakfast quickly and went out to find Fury waiting for him.

Fury trotted through town. Teddy noticed subtle changes such as a new house here and a business there. Some of the grownups he had known were gone and his childhood friends took their places. Some homes had been torn down, replaced by better ones.

When they left the town the grasslands looked much the same as he remembered, although the journey to the castle felt shorter.

The guards came to attention when they arrived and a footman – not Landis – escorted Teddy to the king. Teddy bowed.

Alexander looked the same as he ever had, but older. He smiled broadly.

“Lord Teddy, how good it is to see you. May I present my wife, Queen Laeta.”

“Your Majesty,” Teddy said with a bow. The queen smiled, but said nothing.

The king, queen and Teddy retired to a small room off the great hall. There were comfortable chairs grouped in twos and threes with small tables nearby. Once they were settled there, a footman and a maid brought the same drink Teddy had before and small lemon cakes.

Alexander asked all sorts of questions about Teddy's life. He was pleased to hear the boy had learned to fence.

"We have been at peace for many years, so the joust is only for sport. Many of our young men ply the narrower swords as you do. My son, Erik, loves the challenge of a new fencing partner. You wouldn't mind, would you?"

"That would be great," Teddy replied. "I had hoped to fence against you until I found out you were the king." Ted was about to say so *much older*, but thought that might sound rude.

Alexander smiled, as if understanding what Teddy truly meant, but took no offense.

"I was sad, indeed, when you weren't here to take lessons, but it is the way of things with a realm traveler," the king said.

"Where are your sons?" Teddy asked, looking around.

"They are with their tutor," the queen replied.

"You shall meet them as soon as they're finished their lessons," the king replied. "Erik has had many questions about you since you arrived in the realm."

"How did you know I was here?"

"We are informed as soon as you appear."

Teddy told them about Hilda and Taurek, about Sven's impending marriage and Altha's children.

"It's kind of sad that my friends here have all grown up without me," Teddy said.

"It must be difficult for you," the king said.

Before long, two boys raced into the room. One was Teddy's height and blond like his father. The other was smaller, with dark hair like the Queen's.

"Lord Teddy, this is Prince Erik," Alexander said, indicating the blond, "and this is Prince Ranulf."

"I'm pleased to meet you," Teddy said, standing and giving the boys a bow.

"You said Lord Teddy was your friend when you were young," Erik said, as if his father had lied.

"And I also told you he is of the real world realm, where time passes more slowly."

Erik didn't look convinced, but shook hands with Teddy.

The boys sat on the floor, Erik asking questions of Teddy in the silences between his father's chat. Erik was very anxious to fence Teddy when he heard the visitor knew how.

They took Teddy to the fencing room. The king and Ranulf watched. The queen, who didn't care for sword play, went off to take care of other things.

Erik's movements were quick. He was impetuous and didn't think of strategy. Teddy easily beat him on the first bout.

"You have learned well," the king said when the bout was over. Teddy wondered if he should have let the prince win.

"Best of three?" Erik asked.

Teddy nodded, and they had a second bout. Erik was more cautious, drawing Teddy in. The second bout was a closer contest, and Erik won by a single point.

The third bout was more drawn out, each looking for the other's weakness. When Erik made the winning touch, he crowed his victory. The two boys shook hands, masks in the opposite hand. Then they took off their gear.

"Thank you, Lord Teddy. You are a worthy opponent."

"As are you, Prince Erik."

Erik and Ranulf raced off to another part of the castle. Only when he was sure they had gone did the king speak.

"That was gracefully done, Lord Teddy. You didn't let Erik see that you let him win."

"But I didn't –"

The king held up his hand. If I could see attacks you failed to make, I'm sure you know of them as well, although you made the misses look like mistakes."

Teddy looked at the floor.

"I thought it wouldn't be right to beat the prince on our first meeting."

"You are far better than you let Erik see. But you are truly generous. I wonder, would you have been as generous with me if I weren't too old?"

"I'm sure you have far more experience and expertise than I, so I wouldn't have had to be generous."

Alexander laughed. "Very diplomatic, Teddy."

Teddy was tired and satisfied when he returned from the castle. He also brought a gift the king had asked Teddy to give to Sven and his bride. Sven was overcome by Alexander remembering him.

The day of the wedding dawned bright. The house was full of excitement as Taurek and Hilda made their preparations. Teddy dressed in the fine outfit in the wardrobe. He was astonished that whatever was there fit him perfectly.

Sven was that happy-nervous that people get when they're about to do something important in front of many people. His mother hovered over him, making sure his clothes were just so, from his new black trousers and high-necked shirt to the black linen jacket with the row of silver buttons down each side of the front.

When she wasn't worrying about Sven's clothes or her husband's, Hilda was arranging a pin on her new spring-green tunic or brushing an unseen speck of dust from her matching trousers. Teddy wondered if his own parents would be this nervous if he ever got married.

When all was ready, Sven donned a light cape, as did his parents, and they all walked to the town square. There, a circle made of hand-sized stones had been made. The guests had to stand outside the circle. The circle was about 10 feet in diameter. Inside that circle was another circle about half as large, also outlined in stones. Those were painted bright colors. A path edged in brightly colored stones led to the circle from the opposite direction from the way Sven's family had come.

Sven parted company with them when they reached the town square. Taurek led his wife and Teddy to the front of the outer ring of stones. The guests stood chatting excitedly, greeting newcomers and greeting Lord Teddy.

Soon music started from flutes and lutes. At first Teddy didn't know where the music came from. Then he saw a white tent back a little way from the gathering. Taurek confirmed that the musicians were in the tent.

"Our high priest and Sven are in there as well," Taurek said.

Teddy hadn't seen Sven go into the tent. He was curious about what would take place, since he knew nothing of their religion or their ceremonies.

The crowd was silent. Hilda pointed toward the path, and Teddy saw the bride, dressed in a bright yellow tunic with fancy lace trim and yellow trousers that were so flowing, they almost looked like a skirt. A cape that matched her clothes was attached at the shoulders and hung down her back to the ground. Her long, coppery-red hair hung down her back to her waist.

When she reached the outer circle, Sven was waiting for her. He took her hand and led her to the inner circle, where the high priest awaited them. He wore a long white gown and head gear that looked like a tall, round white box with cloth hanging down the back to his shoulders. There were symbols Teddy didn't understand embroidered around the hat.

"Good people, you come here today to witness the joining of Sven Taurekson and Freya Onidsdaughter."

Sven and Freya joined hands and faced the priest, who began a long prayer in a language Teddy had never heard before. When it ended, the priest held out both of his hands. Sven placed his hand in one of the priest's hands, and Freya placed hers in the other.

"You come to ask the blessing of the gods on your union?"

"We do," the couple said.

"You promise loyalty and love for life?"

“We do.”

“Your children will be raised as upright preservers of the law?”

“They will.”

He took Sven’s hand and Freya’s and joined them again, sandwiching them between his own two hands.

“Let it be so. Let no man and no woman break this pledge between you. Let your lives be long and your prosperity be great. Let your happiness last long and may you be a source of joy to your family and your neighbors.”

Taurek, who stood near the priest but outside the circles, handed the priest a vial. He took the stopper out of the vial and poured some of the liquid – a perfumed oil – onto his finger. He traced a circle on the couple’s clasped hands and then on their foreheads. He said another long prayer in a foreign tongue. When he finished, he took a step back from the couple.

“Let all rejoice in the joining of Sven and Freya!” he said.

The music started, and people cheered as Sven and Freya walked hand in hand down the path. Everyone moved to tents set up across the town square. The day was filled with food and dancing, words of congratulations and stories of Sven’s and Freya’s childhoods. Teddy tended to think of these people as only existing when he was here, and the stories he heard surprised him. They had full lives as he did, getting into mischief, having adventures and times that made Teddy wish he lived in this realm always.

Sven introduced Freya to Teddy. She was shy at first, meeting the legendary Lord Teddy. Ted found it strange that an adult would be shy around a 14-year-old boy. But soon she was laughing and telling stories as everyone else did.

Lord Teddy,” Sven said, reaching into a pocket and pulling something out, “I want you to have something. You have always been a true friend to me, even when I was too young for you to notice. I’d like you to have this as a token of our friendship.”

He handed Teddy a ring with a fish etched on the front.

“Thank you, Sven. I wish I had something to give you in return.”

“Oh, but you have. Last time you were here, you left your wrist watch. I still have it.”

Teddy was astonished. He’d never missed the watch.

Hilda and Taurek were proud of their son, and happy that now he, too, would start a family.

“I wonder what my life will be like,” Teddy said without realizing he’d spoken aloud.

Hilda smoothed his hair in a motherly fashion, and gave him a hug.

“Your life,” she said, “will be what you make it. You’ve had an amazing adventure already for one so young. I know you’ll do your parents proud.”

When the celebrations finally ended, Teddy went home with Taurek and Hilda. Before he went to bed, he slipped the ring into the pocket of his jeans.

# Chapter 6

Teddy awoke with someone pounding on the door. He looked around and found himself back in the storm cellar.

"Teddy, are you in there?" The voice was his mother's. She sounded frantic.

He jumped up and unbolted the cellar door.

"Hi, Mom," he said.

"Teddy, I was worried. The siren sounded a half hour ago that the storm ended. I didn't know where you were."

"Sorry. I guess I fell asleep," he said, putting his hands in the pockets of his jeans. The ring was there, and he slipped it on his finger.

"Well, I'm glad you're safe. Come on in the house."

He followed his mother into the house. It was strange to think he'd only been in the storm cellar 30 or 40 minutes when he'd been in Blevny for several days. This was his longest time there so far. He liked being there.

"I was worried," Teddy said. "This is the first time I've ever been there alone during a storm."

"You know what to do."

"I know. It's just – different," he said, not wanting to admit he was afraid.

"I had a meeting at school, and then I waited till the storm had passed. It was here longer."

He went to his room to work on homework. When he came down for dinner, the sunset glowed through the living room windows.

"Where did you get that ring?" his father asked.

"I found it in the corner of my locker. It fit, so I decided to keep it," Teddy said.

"It looks like a good ring," his mother said. "Did you try to find out who it belonged to?"

"My teacher said to keep it. No one had asked about it, and they don't keep records of who had what locker."

Since Teddy had never stolen anything, and wasn't in the habit of lying, his parents accepted his story. He was glad they didn't suspect he was lying, since they never would have believed the truth.

Later that night when Mr. Lyndhurst was answering emails in their office, Teddy approached his mother.

"Mom, remember when I told you a long time ago about that kingdom I went to?" She looked at him. "Well, every time there's been a tornado I've gone there. Their time moves faster than ours. The boy who was a prince when I first went is the king now and one of his sons is my age. The people I stayed with, their kids are

adults now. I went there again, which is why I didn't come out of the storm cellar. I only just got back when you started knocking on the door. Their son, Sven, just got married. He gave me the ring. It was his."

"Teddy, do you know how crazy that sounds?"

"Yeah, but this ring is proof I was there."

He held out his hand so she could study the ring. It was an unusual design.

"Teddy, you have to get over this fear of the storms. I know it feels safer to pretend you're somewhere else, but a place like that can't exist. You're very creative. I'm sure you could write some lovely stories about the place you pretend to go to, but you have to recognize these places aren't real."

"You just don't believe me because you weren't there. If I could take you, I would."

"Teddy, if I thought I'd gone to a place like that, I'd be in a psychiatrist's office the next day."

"I'm not crazy! And if anything ever happens to you and dad in one of these storms, I'm going to stay there with my friends."

"Nothing will ever happen to us. We know how to be safe."

Well, he had tried. His mother preferred to think he had a good imagination. He supposed that's how everyone would be. He could speak to no one about this. But he could write stories. He didn't think people in Blevny would mind being in his stories for school.

Mrs. Thomas, the elderly librarian saw Teddy working in the library after school for several days. It was unusual to see a student a student so dedicated. She walked a little way behind him to make sure he wasn't playing on the internet. Some students managed to bypass the security and go to sites they weren't supposed to be on. This boy was doing work.

As he wrote, he left spaces where he put in boxes. One box was empty, but as he went back to another page, a picture of a unicorn adorned the top of the page. It made Mrs. Thomas gasp.

Teddy looked up. "Is something wrong?" he asked.

"No, I'm just startled to see a boy writing about unicorns. Usually, it's the girls who are mad for those."

"This is a story about a place where a unicorn happens to live."

"Have you been there?" she asked, smiling. Teddy wondered if she was a bit out of touch, but another part of him wondered if she believed. No, adults would want him to see a psychiatrist if he believed.

He laughed. "It's pretend. Places like that don't exist."

“Are you sure?”

“Have you ever been there?” he asked her.

“I was once. But I never got the chance to go back. And in a school where I used to teach was a girl who went there several times.”

“Did she stay? I mean, if that’s possible?”

“No. She became an author. Perhaps you’ve heard of her: Caitlyn Monroe.”

“Yeah, I’ve read some of her books. You *know* her?”

“I taught in her school, but she was never one of my pupils. I only spoke with her once.”

“But she writes about dragons and things like that. I don’t suppose they’re real?”

“Not to my knowledge. But you haven’t really been to the land of the unicorns?”

Teddy shook his head. He didn’t quite believe this woman, and since he didn’t really know her, it was possible this was some kind of trick.

She sighed. “I’ll leave you to your writing,” she said and walked away.

When he finished his work for the day, Teddy took the late bus home. His mother was already there.

“You’re home late,” she said.

“I wanted to look up some information on pictures for a story for school.”

“You could’ve done that here.”

“Yeah, but school has websites blocked they don’t want us on, so no one has to hover. They have quick access to some really cool clip art.”

“Is your story finished?”

“Almost. Mom, do you know Mrs. Thomas?”

“She’s the librarian, isn’t she?”

“Yeah.”

“Yes, I know her.”

“What do you think of her?”

“She’s very nice. I imagine she knows a lot.”

“Did you know she used to teach in the school Caitlyn Monroe went to?”

“Did she?”

“She said she didn’t teach her, but she met her once.”

“How did you find this out?”

He told her about their conversation.

“I’m sure she was just teasing about the unicorns,” his mother said.

“Probably. But why would she?”

“That’s what some people do to challenge students to consider different pinots of view.”

“Then why don’t you want me to consider different points of view?”

She sighed. “I do. But I don’t want you believing you can go to some other world where unicorns exist just because you’re afraid of tornadoes and want to get away from them. You need to face your fears and come to terms with them. When you understand things, you realize you don’t have to be afraid of them.”

“Mom, tornadoes kill people.”

“I know that. And if you’re not in a shelter, pretending you’re with a unicorn isn’t going to keep you from getting killed.”

“But what if it were a true place?”

“Teddy, if it were, time would be the same there as it is here. You can’t defy the laws of physics.”

“If I were making it up, I wouldn’t have had my friends get a whole lot older than me. The king wouldn’t have died.”

“And all of these people simply accept you. They don’t question anything about you. And they all speak English?”

“I don’t know if they do. I just know I can understand them.”

“You just make sure that when there’s a tornado alarm, you get into a safe place.”

Teddy’s teacher liked the story, telling him it was very creative. When he next saw the librarian, he told her his teacher liked his story.

“Maybe you’ll become an author like Caitlyn Monroe,” she said.

“I don’t know. I was kind of thinking of becoming an architect.”

“I’m sure you’ll be successful whatever you do.”

They had a lot of snow that year. By the third snow day, Teddy almost wished snow would take him to his other realm. Of course, it wouldn’t do much good to have a long adventure only to find five minutes had passed at home, and he still had the rest of the day.

He also wondered if going to Blevny would age him faster. He had lived there entire days. Did he age a whole day for every one there, or did it only count as the five minutes that had passed in the real world? King Eustace had said he was born in the real world. He had lived the rest of his life in Blevny and had died there, aging in their time, not in real world time. Perhaps you only aged in Blevny time if you stayed there. He didn’t know. He also didn’t know how Eustace went from being a real-world person to the king of Blevny.

High school passed in a blur of activities, as if time had sped up. There were tornadoes in neighboring towns and in different parts of the state, but none of that affected him. Blevny and its people drifted from his mind as he prepared to go to college. His parents weren't surprised when he applied to colleges on the east coast. He wanted to be away from "Tornado Alley."

As his eighteenth birthday approached, he decided to visit the college he had chosen. He flew there alone the day after he graduated high school. The school year wasn't yet over for his mother, so she couldn't take the time off, and his father had a big project at work. They thought he could have a little taste of freedom by going alone. They had made arrangements for him to stay with his aunt Sylvia, who lived near the university.

His cousin, Stephen, who attended the university, lived in the city. Stephen took him to see the sights and get a college student's perspective on things. Teddy hadn't seen Stephen in a long time, and they quickly became close friends as well as cousins.

He had been there four days when he returned from sightseeing with Stephen to find his aunt in tears.

"Oh, Teddy!" she said, pulling him to her in a hug.

"What is it, Aunt Sylvia?"

"A tornado."

Something had happened to one of his parents, he was sure. He had a sinking feeling in his stomach, and his mouth felt dry.

"What happened?" he asked, stepping back and looking at her. She had obviously been crying.

She sat down and gestured for him to sit on the chair opposite.

"There was a tornado while your mother was at school. Some serious kind – I don't know much about them. Oh, Teddy, it destroyed everything. Where the school was, there's nothing but rubble. Only two survived in the whole school."

"Mom?"

Aunt Sylvia shook her head. "I'm sorry, Teddy. She's gone."

"Maybe she's just trapped under some rubble."

"They have recovered all of the bodies. They found hers. She was trying to protect a couple of students. One of them was one of the survivors. Apparently something fell on her and knocked her out, so she didn't suffer."

Tears streamed down his face.

"Dad will need –"

He had been on his way home. The area between work and home looked like the tornado had wreaked havoc before it reached the school. There were a number of destroyed or damaged homes and trees down. He had to take a detour down a different street. Apparently, after the detour signs were put up a tree came down on a parked car. Mr. Lyndhurst had to stop suddenly shortly after he turned the corner to keep from hitting it. He was about to turn his car around and try another way when another driver, not so cautious, sped around the corner and slammed into Mr. Lyndhurst's car. His car was crushed between the car wedged under the tree and the one behind. The police thought he'd died instantly, and not suffered from the multiple injuries.

"Oh, Teddy!" Aunt Sylvia cried after she had explained the second catastrophe.

"They're both gone?" he asked in a whisper.

"I'm so sorry. You can stay here, of course."

"I have to go."

"No!"

"Yes, Aunt Sylvia. I have to make the arrangements."

He dashed upstairs and packed his bag. He didn't know what he would do. He had to be sure his aunt wasn't mistaken. He hoped she was. To have lost both parents in a day was beyond imagination. He had lost everything. The worst tornado of his life had happened while he was away. There was really nothing to go back to unless his aunt was wrong about what had happened.

He was 18. Perhaps if he'd been there he could have escaped to Blevny, but now, he thought, Blevny was closed to him. Fury had told him he had to choose when he was eighteen.

He made arrangements for a flight home. When he arrived, he called his friend, Kenny, to meet him at the airport.

"Your parents?" Kenny asked.

"My aunt said they're both gone. Maybe she was wrong."

Kenny put a hand on Teddy's shoulder, and then led him to the car.

Without a word, Kenny drove Teddy past the heap that had been his mother's school. A chimney still stood amid the rubble, but everything around, as far as he could see, had been destroyed. Huge rigs of all kinds were moving the destruction into trucks to be hauled away.

"They'll need you to make identifications," Kenny said quietly. "Shall I take you home first?"

"No," Teddy said.

Kenny drove to the hospital. Neither of them spoke. Teddy was too devastated. Kenny didn't know what he could say that would be helpful.

The medical examiner let Kenny come with Teddy. She showed Teddy his parents. His mother looked peaceful at least, but there was no doubt she was gone. Teddy nodded, and then covered his face with his hands while the medical examiner pulled the sheet that covered Mrs. Lyndhurst up to cover her face.

When he had control of himself, Teddy looked at his father. He had some scrapes on his face. Teddy couldn't tell whether or not there was any other damage. He, too, looked peaceful, as if he'd simply fallen asleep.

Kenny stood behind Teddy the whole time, his hands on Teddy's shoulders. He led him out to the hall where there were chairs against the wall. They both sat. Both young men cried. Kenny had been in Mrs. Lyndhurst's sixth grade class.

"I have nothing left, Ken. My family is gone and I can't even go to Blevny."

Kenny looked at him in surprise. "You mean that place was real?"

Teddy looked at his hands. "I know you thought I was crazy, and no one ever believed me, but yes. I believe it was. A friend there gave me this."

He held out his hand to show the fish ring he now wore on his pinky finger.

"But you could still go –"

Teddy shook his head. "They said I'd have to decide by the time I was eighteen."

"Did you?"

"I don't know. I haven't been there since I was fourteen. I guess choosing to go to college must have been the decision."

"Wow."

They sat quietly for several minutes while Teddy signed some forms. Then Kenny took him home.

Home. Although everything was familiar, this house was only an empty shell, a painful reminder of what had been. He wandered through the rooms like a zombie, memories flooding his brain at the sight of some of the everyday things in the house

He went into his parents' room and chose an outfit for each of them to be buried in. He knew people did that. When he had everything ready, he went to see the funeral director to make arrangements.

The days between then and the funeral were a blur. Kenny's parents offered Teddy a place to stay, but he preferred to stay by himself in his own house. He didn't want to be social and have to pretend to be all right.

On the day of the funeral, Teddy, dressed in his best suit, looked like an adult. His expression was sad, but he had done all of his crying at home.

His parents' caskets were side by side at the cemetery. Teachers from the school district came. Most were friends of his mother's, and several had been his teachers. Many of her former students were also there.

Many of Mr. Lyndhurst's friends and work colleagues also attended the funeral. Teddy was a bit surprised to see his cousin, Stephen. He thought it would have been too far for him to travel for a funeral. Aunt Sylvia came with him. Other relatives who lived closer were also there. So were classmates he hadn't thought really liked him. Of course, Kenny and his family were there. Teddy could always depend on him, and he was sad that he hadn't been honest with Kenny about the kingdom of Blevny. He also regretted that he could never bring Kenny with him to the kingdom.

That part of his life was over now. He'd have to see how everything could be taken care of here before he started college. At least he hoped he could still afford college.

He wanted to sell the house. After what had happened to his parents, he never wanted to live in this part of the country again. He thought Aunt Sylvia or Stephen would let him stay with them when school was out, and once he graduated from college he would find his own place on the East Coast. He'd heard they had hurricanes, but that as long as he lived far enough north, they didn't happen very often.

When the last prayers were said and carnations laid on the coffins, the mourners left the cemetery. Teddy went to dinner with his relatives, but didn't feel like talking. He forced himself to be social so they wouldn't think he was rude, but he just wanted to be left alone.

They finally went their separate ways. Aunt Sylvia didn't want to let Teddy go home alone, but Stephen finally convinced her that her nephew was an adult and could take care of himself. Teddy was grateful to his cousin.

Once home, he took off his suit and changed into jeans and a T shirt. He hoped no one would decide he needed company. He locked the doors and left lights off. It wasn't dark, and the late June evening was pleasant. If everyone would just leave him alone, he'd figure something out.

Nighttime came, but he wasn't tired. He wandered out to the yard, and decided to check out the storm cellar. He switched on the light to make sure the batteries were still good, and looked around as if he'd never seen the room before. The chair his mother always sat in looked old, the cushions frayed, and the stuffing came out at some of the seams. His old children's novels lay in stacks on the little table, and a shelf held other books, magazines and snack foods. His old sleeping bag lay on top of a thick yoga mat on the floor.

He lay on the sleeping bag and closed his eyes, wondering why he had chosen to go back east when he did. He hadn't been able to say goodbye to his parents. In truth, even if he'd been home they would all have been in different places. The outcome wouldn't have been different.

*If I'd been home, perhaps I would have had one more trip to Blevny. Perhaps I could have chosen to stay there. But then I wouldn't have known of their deaths,* he thought.

Tears ran down his face. He was a man now, not that boy full of dreams. But he didn't want to be an adult. He wanted to be a child just a while longer, and make his own choice about whether to stay in the real world or stay forever in Blevny.

He was so lost in his own misery, he didn't notice that the wind had picked up, and the unlocked storm cellar door was rattling against the frame. In the storm cellar, he couldn't clearly hear the siren. He was as unaware of the real world as if he wasn't in it.

# Chapter 7

"Are you hurt, Lord Teddy?"

Teddy opened his eyes, startled. Above him, Fury's face came into view.

"How – am I in Blevny? I thought I was too old," he said, rolling over and coming to a stand. "I'm really here?"

"As you see," Fury replied.

He looked around and saw he was on the edge of the woods, and the cyclone was across the field from him.

"I thought a tornado had to happen for me to get here."

"I do not know what conditions cause you to appear. But I am glad you have come."

"I guess there are a lot of changes."

"King Alexander is quite old. He speaks of you often. Hilda is quite old as well. Taurek died two years past. Sven has four sons. Altha's daughter and sons are nearly grown."

"How are Prince Erik and Prince Ranulf?"

"Erik gains the approval of the people daily. He executes his father's commands with the kindness of his father and grandfather."

"And Ranulf?"

"Ranulf is a lone wolf. He chafes at being the younger son, and causes trouble wherever he goes."

"Why does he do that?"

"They believe he has a weak mind, but there is no way to prove it. If he commits a crime something can be done."

"Isn't there a third child?"

"Yes, Princess Gildalen. She has grown into a beauty. She is of an age to take a husband."

Teddy climbed onto Fury's back and they trotted through the woods to the village. People who saw Teddy cheered and the main street became too clogged with well-wishers for Fury to go farther.

The young man slid off Fury's back.

Sven came out of his house to greet Teddy, a young boy on his shoulders.

"You've returned to us, Lord Teddy," he said.

"I am glad to be here. I thought your children would be grown."

"I had a son and daughter who died of a wasting sickness. My other daughter, Branna was spared. She is 10. And this is Taurek, three years old today."

"Greetings of the day, Taurek," Teddy said.

Sven took Teddy into his house – the same house Taurek and Hilda had lived in. Hilda sat in a corner near the fire, an ancient lady, while Sven's wife, Freya, made bread at the table.

"Good cheer to you all," Teddy said. Hilda looked at him and smiled. He approached and kissed her cheek. "It is good to see you, Hilda."

"You've come home," she said, her voice soft.

Sven set little Taurek on his feet and gave Teddy a proper greeting.

"Have you come to stay?" Sven asked.

"I would like to. This is all quite a surprise to me. I didn't expect to be here since I've already turned 18."

"So, this is your last trip."

"I have little enough to lure me back to my world. Both my parents were killed in a tornado strike."

Sven grasped Teddy's shoulder.

"But you survived?"

"I was away when it happened. Still, I don't know what I need to do to stay."

"The king will know. But you can't see him on an empty stomach. I will fetch Altha. She would wish to see you."

He left, only to return a few minutes later with Altha and her daughter, Birgid, who was now about as old as Teddy, and as lovely as any girl he'd ever seen. If she wasn't as beautiful to others, Teddy didn't know why.

Birgid was nearly as tall as Teddy, with light hair like Sven's and eyes like emeralds. She smiled and blushed, but said nothing.

"This is my daughter," Altha said. "Do you remember her?"

"I do. She was tiny when I saw her last," Teddy said, then looked at the girl. "Do you have a boyfriend, Birgid?"

"No, sir. They say I'm too bookish."

"There's no such thing. They say the same of me," he said. She looked at him in wonder.

Altha and Sven gave each other knowing looks.

Altha's husband, Aris, arrived from the smithy, and they all sat down to dinner. The adults reminisced about other times Teddy had visited. Aris had been one of the boys he had played with when Altha and Sven were still children.

"How can that be?" Birgid asked. "You look no older than I."

"Other worlds move time differently," Teddy said. "I am 18 now. But I knew your grandfather when he was younger than your father is now. If I stay, I suppose I'll age as you do."

They spent an evening reminiscing about Teddy's other visits, and then went to bed.

In the morning Teddy went to see the king. Alexander was delighted to see him, as was Erik.

"I remember your kindness in not defeating me soundly when we bouted," Erik said.

"Who told you that, Your Highness?" Teddy asked, looking at the king.

"Even then I knew. You bested me soundly enough in the first try."

"But I didn't let you run away with it."

"As I said, you were kind."

They discussed changes in the kingdom and hopes for the future.

"And what of Ranulf?" Teddy asked, when the other prince wasn't mentioned.

"He is not as I would have wished, Lord Teddy. He is ever angry. He does not think before he acts. I fear for what may have to be done."

Teddy didn't ask more. He didn't really want to know what might be done with Ranulf.

As they prepared to have lunch, Ranulf stormed into the dining room.

"So, the reports were true," he said, glaring at Teddy.

"You remember Lord Teddy," the king said.

"As if anyone could forget. Is he not the son you wished you had?"

"That is uncalled for, Ranulf. We were of an age to be brothers when we first met. He has always been a friend to the realm."

"What are your intentions, Lord Teddy? Will you stay?" Ranulf's question sounded like an accusation.

"I wish to stay, if that is possible."

"And then vie with our family to be the king?"

"Ranulf!" Alexander said.

"King? Why would I wish to be king?"

"My grandfather was from your realm."

"Ranulf doesn't seem to know his history. My mother was the only child of the previous king. When she married my father, she created him king to help her rule. She left many powers to him once she had children. That was her way. My father did not usurp the throne."

"No, but now that Lord Teddy is here, he will look for a wife. My sister –"

"I'm 18. I'm not looking for a wife just yet. And I would never be worthy of a princess."

"How noble! You would expect to marry well," Ranulf continued.

"If I ever marry, it will be for love, not power."

“Enough, Ranulf!” Alexander said. “What Lord Teddy does is no concern of yours, and I make decisions concerning who your sister marries. Now, if you intend to eat with us, sit down.”

Ranulf sat with a thud and began eating without another word.

Princess Gildalen entered the room quietly and approached her father. She looked very like her brother, Erik, her hair golden, eyes blue. She was nearly as tall as Erik, too. Teddy thought she was beautiful, but like a sculpture. He did not fall instantly in love with her as Ranulf appeared to expect.

Gildalen spoke quietly to her father.

“Gildalen, I would like you to meet Lord Teddy. You were not yet born last time he was here.”

Teddy stood and bowed to her. Gildalen curtsied. “I am pleased to meet you, Lord Teddy. I’ve heard many good things about you.”

“It is good to meet you also,” he replied.

She curtsied again and left the room.

Although he said nothing, Ranulf stared angrily at his food as he finished eating. Teddy noticed, but Alexander and Erik chatted as if nothing was wrong.

When the meal ended, they left the room and returned to the audience hall. Erik had to leave then. He had duties to the realm. The king also had business, so he took his leave of Teddy.

As Teddy walked down the corridor to the entrance, Ranulf caught up with him.

“I remember you were a good fencer, Lord Teddy.”

“Yes, I am.”

“Would you compete against me? A friendly competition.”

“I don’t think you feel all that friendly toward me.”

“So you’re afraid I might defeat you?”

“I don’t know what your skill is, but I am not afraid to fence you.”

Ranulf smiled. It didn’t look friendly.

“I’m sure you’re tired from all you’ve done today. Shall we meet tomorrow morning?” Ranulf suggested.

“If you wish,” Teddy said.

“Perfect.”

Teddy returned to the village.

“Do you think it is wise to fence with Ranulf?” Fury asked on the way.

“He isn’t friendly, but I don’t think he’d seriously harm me.”

“Don’t trust him, Lord Teddy.”

“Not at all. But if he’s as good a fencer as his brother, I know I can defeat him.”

“Whatever the outcome, you must respect that he is a prince. Still, it would be better if you did not compete against him.”

“Then he’ll call me a coward. And I’m not afraid.”

“It would be better to be thought a coward than risk what might befall you.”

“I understand, Fury, but this way I can put his threats to rest once and for all. If he defeats me, he can be satisfied that he bested me fairly. If I defeat him, he will understand it isn’t worth having me as an enemy.”

Fury said no more. Teddy was determined, as young men his age often were, to prove himself through competition.

Teddy spent his afternoon and evening in the company of Birgid and her brothers, Garth and Leif. The boys were fascinated that Teddy had such access to the king, and that he was to compete against Prince Ranulf.

“Will you defeat him, do you think?” Birgid asked.

“I hope so. But whatever happens, I hope it will end his dislike of me. I have done nothing to him, yet he seems convinced that I wish to be king or that I wish to marry his sister.”

Birgid turned red then pale.

“And do you?”

“No. I have no claim to kingship. Alexander is the rightful king, and Erik after him.”

“And what of the princess?”

“She’s a confection. Beautiful, but that sort of beauty you appreciate from afar, like a painting or a sculpture, not the kind you long for – at least I don’t. As I’ve only briefly met her, I know nothing about her.”

“But you might come to love her?”

“As a sister, perhaps. She’s not to my taste. Besides, I’m too young to think of things like that.”

“But when you do – what sort of girl inspires you?”

It dawned on him what she wanted to know, and he wasn’t sure whether he should say, “You, Birgid” or simply give generalities that would hint she might be the kind of girl who would interest him.

“I think someone who has a bit of daring, someone who isn’t empty-headed, someone I can talk to and who has good insight.”

“Do you think you will stay here and marry?”

“Yes. I have no reason to return to my own world. My parents are dead. I have no brothers or sisters.”

“No girlfriend?”

“No girlfriend.”

“But friends – surely you have friends?”

“A few. No one who would miss me. I had a friend, Kenny, who wanted to come here with me. But I think he might have ridiculed the people here. I don’t think he would understand the society here. Still, his family was kind to me when my parents died.”

“I’m glad he wasn’t able to come, then.”

“We will make up for his loss,” Garth said.

“Will you have children?” Birgid asked.

“People do, don’t they?” Teddy replied. “More than one, though. I think I lost something not having brothers or sisters.”

“What will you do for work?” Leif asked.

“I don’t know. I had plans to become an architect in my world.”

“You could have that here,” Birgid said. My father knows members of the builder’s guild.

Teddy had known Birgid’s father when they were children. He had befriended Teddy. He would speak with him once things were settled.

The day grew late. Teddy and Birgid parted ways. Before she left she ventured to kiss his cheek. Trying to be gallant, as people in the novels he read were, he kissed her hand. She blushed and ran off to her home.

“You and Birgid make a nice couple,” Sven teased when Teddy entered the house.

“When the time comes for me to marry, she would make a good wife,” Teddy replied. “But it may be several years before I’m ready.

Sven smiled and patted his shoulder.

The next morning dawned bright and sunny. Teddy washed and dressed. Freya made him breakfast.

When he finished, he left for the castle. The townsfolk had heard of the match between Lord Teddy and Prince Ranulf, and all wished him good luck.

Fury told Teddy of Ranulf’s weaknesses.

“He is easy to distract, but he is easily angered. Both can be to your advantage, but beware his anger. And it has been said he is less than honest.”

“I’ll remember,” Teddy said, briefly remembering Hilda calling Fury a gossip.

Teddy felt nervous. He knew he was a good fencer, but if he soundly defeated Ranulf, he wasn’t sure how the king would react.

Erik greeted Teddy as he arrived at the castle.

“Your fencing gear has been laid out for you, Lord Teddy, and there are several epees for you to choose from.”

So, it was to be epee.  Teddy had thought Ranulf would prefer sabers.

“I cannot help you, you understand, because if anything ill were to befall you, I would be blamed in foul play, as your opponent’s brother.”

“I would not blame you. But this is a friendly match, so I expect nothing ill to befall any of us.”

Erik became serious. “Teddy, you know that it is not friendly. Ranulf is disturbed and sees you as no friend. The rest of us do not agree with him. And my father sends a message: fight with all of your skill. There is to be a fair contest, not one for your pleasantries. Ranulf is skilled. I trust you know what he means?”

“I do.”

“Luck to you, then,” Erik said, and they parted ways.

Although Fury had already returned to the stables, he maintained a mental contact with Teddy.

Teddy dressed in fencing gear, chose two weapons – one in the event the first one broke – picked up his mask and entered the fencing room.

At each end of the fencing strip was a table with a goblet and a pitcher of water. In the middle, off to one side of the fencing strip stood three men. They would judge the hits and keep score.

Ranulf entered at the end opposite Teddy. The king sat a little distance from the middle of the strip at the side opposite the judges, his chair on a raised platform. Several people stood near the king to watch. Alexander stood.

“This is to be a friendly bout between peers. This is not a battle. I expect you both to do your best and engage in fair play according to the rules amongst gentlemen. The ruling of the judges is final. It is to be a best-of-three competition. When it is concluded, there is to be no enmity on anyone’s part. Begin.”

He sat and the two opponents saluted and put on their masks. Then they stood on their en garde lines. At the judge’s signal, they began.

Ranulf was impetuous. He charged down the strip at Teddy. Teddy was more cautious, watching, weighing his movements He quickly scored the first point. Ranulf was no slower on the second try, but slowed as he reached Teddy. He tested Teddy’s reflexes, beating on his weapon to see how he reacted. He waited too long, and Teddy made a quick move and scored a second point.

Ranulf remained calm. Teddy’s moves gave him answers just as his did for Teddy.

The next two touches went to Ranulf, and he strutted too confidently to the en garde line. The next time he came forward too quickly, and Teddy made a decisive touch to his wrist. Again, Teddy found an opening and made the touch. Ranulf lost his composure, rushing toward Teddy and coming in for a forceful touch that was

parried away. Teddy's riposte came quickly.

"First bout to Lord Teddy," the judge announced.

They took a pause for water, then stood ready for the second bout. Ranulf was a different fencer in the second bout, fast yet cautious, calm, his attacks well placed. He easily had the first three touches, and Teddy struggled to land a touch on Ranulf. The second bout ended in a victory for Ranulf, five touches to Teddy's two.

The second break was a bit longer. The fencers wiped sweat from their brows, taking long draughts of water before returning to the fencing strip.

Ranulf was a raging monster in the final bout. He attacked with all his strength, his parries practically disarming Teddy. In one attempt to beat Teddy's weapon away, Ranulf hit with such force he was too far to the side to make the touch. Teddy was able to flick the point of his weapon under Ranulf's to score. The score quickly became four to two in Teddy's favor. One more touch and he could be done with this beast.

Teddy drew Ranulf out, making him believe a false attack. Ranulf attempted to parry, but Teddy disengaged his blade and came in for the touch. Ranulf counter-parried so quickly and so hard he did disarm Teddy, and made his third touch before anyone realized Teddy's weapon had left his hand. But Ranulf's touch was as uncontrolled as his parry, and he hit with such force he broke his blade and knocked Teddy off his feet.

Ranulf stalked off to get a second weapon, and one of the judges helped Teddy to his feet. Teddy was wary now. That touch had hurt and he knew he'd have a bruise. Ranulf toyed with him now, trying to time his hit. But Teddy had often faced opponents who played that game. He pretended not to know what Ranulf was doing, watching for an opening, hoping Ranulf would make the sort of mistake he'd made in the first bout.

The moves back and forth seemed to go on forever. Finally, Ranulf made a move that looked like a mistake. Teddy thought it might be a trap. He came in with a feint attack and discovered his suspicion was correct. Ranulf attempted to trap Teddy's blade, but he flicked it past Ranulf's and hit him in the hip.

"Point and match to Lord Teddy," the judge announced.

Teddy removed his mask and extended his hand for the final handshake, but Ranulf lunged at him. Teddy had to jump back to avoid an attack to his face.

"Ranulf!" the king shouted.

One judge tried to intervene, and Ranulf slapped him with the length of the blade.

Erik and several others ran to Ranulf, trying to wrestle the sword from his hand, but he managed to throw them off. Their intervention gave Teddy the chance to put

his mask back on. He was ready as Ranulf escaped the others and came at him. Ranulf showed none of the caution or finesse he had when he did his best. Instead, he moved like one possessed, one intent on killing.

"Teddy, his point is sharpened," Erik shouted in horror.

Teddy fought with all of his skill, trying to keep the deadly point from hitting its mark. He didn't know what insight made him accurately parry attacks he didn't see coming, but he managed to beat the point away repeatedly and advance close enough that Ranulf was unable to attempt a hit with his point.

In a quick movement, Teddy turned his weapon around so the pommel faced forward. He brought it up quickly with as much strength as he had left. It hit Ranulf hard at the base of the mask, knocking the prince onto the floor. Before Ranulf could collect his wits, Teddy put his foot on the prince's sword arm to keep it still, and grabbed the pointed epee from his hand. Teddy dropped his own weapon and held Ranulf's pointed at the prince.

Teddy backed away a few paces, the sword pointed at Ranulf.

"Get up!" he said angrily.

In his head he heard Fury's voice as distressed as he'd ever heard it, saying, "Lord Teddy, you cannot harm the prince. It would mean your life."

He didn't know where the unicorn was or how he knew what was happening, but Teddy couldn't afford to let his attention waver or Ranulf would wrest the sword from him. The prince seemed to have superhuman strength. Teddy knew he was too tired from the struggle to keep Ranulf from killing him if the prince got the sword again.

Slowly, the prince stood, pulling the mask from his head. He faced Teddy with a look of utter hatred.

"What are you waiting for? Kill me!"

"Turn around," Teddy commanded.

"Oh, you'd stab me in the back. No one ever told me the great Lord Teddy was a coward."

"Turn around!" he shouted.

The prince turned.

"Now, go to the king for mercy," Teddy said.

The prince obeyed slowly. Teddy followed just far enough away that the sword did not touch the prince.

The king stood on the platform where his chair had been placed.

"Your Majesty," Teddy said, "I apologize for the fight and any injury to your son. Punish me as you will. Here is your son for your safekeeping."

“He deserves no safe keeping,” the king said. “Guards! Bind Prince Ranulf. Put him in irons in the tower until justice can be given.”

Teddy continued to hold the sword pointed at Ranulf until two burly guards had bound the prince’s hands behind his back and led him away. Then Teddy lowered the sword, turned it pommel out to the king with the blade over his non-fighting arm. Teddy bowed.

The king reached down and took the sword. Then he broke it over his knee, tossing the two pieces onto the floor between himself and Teddy.

“Lord Teddy, you have done a service to our realm. Prince Ranulf has ever been wild, but no one knew his anger had turned to insanity. He will be dealt with as we see fit. You are in no wise responsible for the despicable behavior shown here today. Had you put the prince to the sword, you would have acted within your rights, and no harm would have come to you. Name what we can do to repay you for your trouble.”

“Your Majesty, I ask to be able to stay in your kingdom and to continue to enjoy your friendship for the rest of my life.”

“I grant it as far as it is in my power to do. Whatever you desire is yours, and you and yours need never fear harm from Prince Ranulf. But Fury will guide you to the way of becoming a permanent member of our realm.”

“I thank you, Sire.”

“Now, you must be tired. Go with my blessing and revive yourself. And then tonight as the moon rises, we will feast.”

Teddy bowed and left the room he hoped never to see again.

Once he had changed into his own clothes, he went out to find Fury, who took him home to Sven’s house. Sven and his family had gone to see the event, but had left once they knew Teddy was safe.

“No matter what the king said, you would have paid with your life if you’d killed Prince Ranulf,” Fury said. “It is the law of the land that even a king may not discard.”

“Shut up! I was not going to kill him. Now, what is it I have to do to be able to stay here forever?”

“You are tired, Lord Teddy. Time enough for that tomorrow.”

“No! I might not be here tomorrow!”

“I assure you, you cannot go before the test. You have chosen to come here, and this is the last time you will be able to do so. You will not be returned to your world unless you choose to before the test, or unless you fail.”

“What test? What do I need to study?”

Fury whickered and it sounded like a laugh. “It is not that sort of test. Tomorrow.”

They arrived at Sven’s door and Teddy got off the unicorn.

All the while Teddy and the unicorn were having this discussion, they were travelling slowly along the crowded road between the castle and the village. Villagers who crowded the road cheered for Lord Teddy, defender of the common man. He waved as he rode along. Ranulf was unpopular among the townsfolk, who feared he’d one day kill Prince Erik and take the throne himself. Thanks to his poor behavior toward Teddy, that would not happen now. They had no doubt that, even though he was Alexander’s son, the king would deal harshly with him.

When Teddy entered Sven’s house, his friend put a hand on his shoulder and congratulated him on his defeat of the prince.

“I was so proud of you when I heard what had happened,” Hilda said. She was too old and infirm to attend the match.

“I did what I had to do to stay alive,” Teddy replied.

He was tired, and after a small meal, he went to his room to sleep.

Teddy awoke, just as the sun was setting. He dressed and went into the main room. Freya was dressed in her finest outfit of yellow with flowers in a pattern on the tunic, and a flower wreath woven into her hair. Sven, too, was dressed for a festival. They saw Teddy was ready, and they all left. Hilda was already asleep for the night.

They stopped by Altha’s home, where Altha and her husband, Aris, Birgid and her brothers joined the party.

They took a shortcut path since they were walking. It was much faster than the road Fury rode on.

“Where is Fury?” Teddy asked.

“He is resting. He knew you would have no need of him this evening,” Sven said.

“Do not worry, Lord Teddy,” Aris said. “Fury is safe.”

Teddy had taken Birgid’s hand as they walked, and the two discussed things young people their age talked about. When they arrived at the castle grounds, they were still holding hands.

Teddy saw the king and queen.

“Come, let us pay our respects,” Teddy said.

“No,” Sven said. “It is not our place. You go.”

“Don’t be silly! I’ve spoken of you to the king. He would like to meet you.”

They all looked reluctant, but they followed Teddy. They all bowed when Teddy did.

"Ah, Lord Teddy," the king said. "Welcome!"

"Your Majesty, I would like you to meet my good friends who have taken care of me every time I was here."

He introduced each member of Sven's and Altha's families. The king greeted each and demonstrated he knew the livelihood of everyone in the family.

"Ah, and this lovely lass, Birgid, is your chosen one."

Teddy and Birgid both turned scarlet.

"We are great friends, Your Majesty. What may happen in the future, time will tell us."

Alexander gave them a knowing smile. While the two had made no decisions yet, the grownups could see the obvious, that one day Teddy and Birgid would marry.

There was feasting on roasted duck and swan, ripe fruit and all kinds of nuts, cakes and pies, potatoes and a few foods Teddy didn't recognize.

Musicians played and the people danced. The king and queen joined in with everyone. They didn't stay aloof from the villagers and townsfolk.

Those in attendance had a good time, and many were sad to leave when the evening revels were over.

Teddy walked home arm in arm with Birgid. They had both danced with several other people. Teddy had even danced with Princess Gildalen. But the last dance of the evening Teddy danced with Birgid.

He stopped outside her door to say goodnight while her parents went inside. Sven and his family continued to his house.

"I enjoyed my time with you tonight," Teddy said.

"So did I," Birgid replied.

Then he kissed her, a real kiss, not the quick kiss on the cheek she had given him earlier.

"Good night, Teddy."

"Good night, Birgid."

She went into the house, and he returned to Sven's house happier than he had been in some time.

In the morning Teddy awoke but lay in bed for a while thinking about the evening before. He wanted to hold onto the pleasure of the evening, but suddenly the memory of having a test waiting for him banished all of the pleasant thoughts.

He dressed in the clothes he had found in the wardrobe, leaving his own clothes on the hook. He even put on the boots, leaving his sneakers behind in the hope that the things from this world would bring him good luck to pass the test.

He went out into the main room where Freya was preparing breakfast.

"You are just in time, Lord Teddy."

"I'm not hungry."

"You must eat something."

He shook his head and she made no more of it. She could see he was worried about whatever he would be required to do.

"You must bring something of yours from your world." Sven said.

Teddy returned to his room. He had nothing. He grabbed the sneakers, hoping they would count.

Before he left, Teddy shook hands with Sven and thanked him and Freya.

"You will be back, I'm sure," Sven said.

"I truly don't know. That's what I hope."

Sven and Freya wished him good luck and then Fury took him out of the village. They rode through the woods and finally came out onto the open plain. Fury didn't stop until they were a few feet from the cyclone. Then he instructed Teddy to get down.

"What am I supposed to do?" Teddy asked, uncomfortable being so close to the humming black cylinder.

"You are sure you wish to stay here?"

"Yes. I've never wanted anything this much in my life."

"You brought something from your world?"

"My sneakers. Is that all right?"

"Yes. You must approach close enough to throw them into the cyclone."

"That's it?"

"Then you will wait. If you are accepted, they will stay – or more precisely, they will be taken to your world where you left it. If they are thrown back out of the cyclone, it means you may not stay."

"Then what happens?"

"If that happens, you will be sucked into the cyclone and returned to your world where you left it. Do not be afraid. Even if you are taken into the cyclone, you will not be harmed, and this realm will be as a dream to you."

"Is there any way I should throw them that might make sure they won't come back out?" Teddy asked. He was nearly crying at the thought that he might fail as well as at the idea that he'd be sucked into a cyclone. He couldn't think of anything more terrifying.

“Be brave, Lord Teddy. You cannot cheat the will of the cyclone.”

Baseball had never been Teddy’s strong suit. He only hoped he could throw the shoes hard enough to ensure they would not come out.

He gripped both shoes together and threw. He was afraid they would land on the ground just beside the cyclone. But the suction of the wind caught the shoes and pulled them into the vortex.

He looked hesitantly at Fury. “Now what?”

“We wait a few moments. The cyclone does not take long deciding.”

Teddy backed away from the whirling cylinder, hoping that distance could keep him from being sucked into it. He expected at any moment the sneakers would fly out of the cyclone. He had that little faith in his skill at throwing.

A little time lengthened into a minute, then two, then five. He dared to hope he’d seen the last of the sneakers.

“Come, Lord Teddy. Let us be off to the village.”

He stared at Fury. “You mean it accepted me?”

“Indeed. You are one of us now.”

Teddy ran around the plain whooping and jumping. He had realized his dream. He didn’t know whether or not he’d get to be an architect, but as long as he was here, it really didn’t matter.

Finally calm, he climbed onto Fury’s back, and they returned to the village. People who were outside and saw them arrive knew Teddy was staying with them. They cheered and applauded until the entire village stood around him clapping.

“I knew you would succeed,” Sven said.

Aris approached. “Of course you are welcome to stay with Sven as long as you wish, and Hilda would welcome it, but when you are ready, there is a house, newly built, in the center of town that we would all be honored if you would call your home.”

“Thank you.”

He slid off Fury’s back and looked at the unicorn.

“Fury, I can’t believe it!”

“This is no dream,” the unicorn replied. “But here is where I must leave you.”

“Leave me?”

“Yes. My part in your story is finished.”

“But where will you go?”

“I will go back to where the unicorns live.”

“I thought there was only one unicorn!”

“Only one in a given kingdom. But in our space we are many. Another will come here to take my place when another child visits the realm. You’ll see.”

“But I don’t want you to go!”

“I do not wish to leave, but I must. We cannot have everything we wish for.”

Teddy hugged the unicorn as tears sprung into the boy’s eyes.

“I will miss you,” Teddy cried.

“And I you,” Fury replied.

Teddy let go of the unicorn and backed away. Fury turned and walked back down the path through the woods.

Soon, Teddy was cheered by his friends, especially by Birgid. He would never forget Fury, but he knew now he had a home and people who loved him as a son or a brother. He had found his dream.

# Epilogue

The funnel cloud had hit the town, upturning trees and breaking homes into pieces. When it was over only one in every five houses still stood. Kenny's family had been lucky. Their house still stood, although there had been some damage to the house, and a tree had crushed his father's car. He was concerned about Teddy, who had gone home by himself.

When they arrived at the spot where Teddy's house had once stood, there was only rubble. The house was gone, bricks, shattered glass and wood littered the yard. The furniture was no more than scraps of fabric, stuffing and pieces of wood or shards of glass.

While Kenny's parents and some others who were trying to find survivors called out and dug through the rubble, Kenny went into the storm cellar. The door had been torn off. As he started down the stairs he heard his mother say, "Oh, how awful! He just lost his parents. Now he's lost everything else. I hope he isn't hurt."

Kenny looked around the storm cellar. He and Teddy had occasionally played in it, and except for the water on the floor and a few things that had blown in through the door, it still looked much as it always had.

"Ted?" Kenny called.

He picked up a lamp from the floor and turned it on. Apparently, the batteries were still good. He looked around holding the lamp high. All was quiet. If Teddy had been here, perhaps he'd gone out looking for someplace safe after the storm. Kenny would have to ask around to see if anyone had seen him. He couldn't imagine that someone as afraid of tornadoes as Teddy would stay in the house. He must have come in here. Yet he hadn't latched the door lock. If he had, the door never would have come off.

"Ted?" he called again, then stopped. Sitting neatly on top of the old sleeping bag were Teddy's sneakers. He never would have left the shelter without them amid all of this destruction.

Kenny thought he had his answer. Teddy had confessed that the other realm was real. Perhaps he had managed to make one last visit. Ken was fairly certain they would never find any trace of Teddy Lyndhurst here.

"Well, friend, I hope you made it to your other world, and live a long, happy life."

He picked up the shoes, put them in a bag he found and took it with him. Best not to mention the shoes to anyone, he thought. It would just make people ask more questions they'd never get the answers to.

Kenny doubled back to his own house and hid the shoes in the back of his closet where they'd never be noticed.